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NYLA K.

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This book is dedicated to online supporters, in all your unbridled enthusiasm.
To the likers, the commenters, the sharers…
The subscribers, Insta-stalkers and re-tweeters.
This is for you… the *fans*.

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Kyran Harbor is everything I'm not.
Rich. Popular. A superstar football player who's awfully broody for someone who has it all.
Basically, he's a preppy jock who hates me. Oh, and he's also my stepbrother.
That's right. We're stuck together, sharing a school, a house… A bathroom.
Honestly, I wouldn't care… If he wasn't such an uptight control-freak who messes with me just because we're different.
I had every intention of avoiding him when we got to college… Until abrupt misfortune forces us both into a compromising position.
Now the grouchy jerk I was hoping to evade might be the only person who can help me out of it.

Avi Vega is everything I despise.
A dreamer. A flake. An artist who smokes too much weed and thinks aliens exist. And by some sick cosmic joke, he's now my stepbrother, following me on what should've been my escape plan.
It was already a disaster. Add a sudden financial disruption to the mix, and let's just say my options are heavily limited.
If I want to stay an all-star quarterback on the way to the NFL, I'll need to do something drastic. Unfortunately for me, and my desperate desire for control, the perpetually smiling stoner has a plan.

Maybe we can stop hating each other just enough to pull this off. As long as we remember we're only doing it… *for the fans.*

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FOREWORD

I'll be honest here… Preparing you for what to expect from this story is extremely difficult. You're about to embark upon a long, complex journey with these characters.

If you're a Nyla K reader, you don't need to be told this. But if this is your first time reading my work, I'll just ask that you go into this book with an open mind. Don't expect it to be like anything else. I can't hand you a list of triggers and tropes, because honestly, we'd be here all day. That said, there are some things I have to warn you about, if you feel that *warnings* are something you'd like to have.

Before I get to the nitty gritty, so to speak, I want to stress that this book contains references to real people, places, and events, woven within a fictional story. Please note that everything has been dramatized for the sake of creating art and entertainment. So any mention of real things you recognize are placed within fictional context.

Next, and most importantly, I have a responsibility to let you know that there are some highly sensitive matters discussed in this book. But in the interest of not spoiling the story, I have listed them on the content warning page of my website.

Make no mistake, I want you, the reader, to feel the organic, raw emotions of these characters. But I *don't* want it to negatively affect your emotional state. If you have certain triggers, I want you to be prepared before reading.

So here we go. If you have *no triggers* in fiction, I highly recommend that you *do not view* the content warning page. Go into the book relatively blind, just knowing it's a queer stepbrother romance that involves filming sex acts for money, and have fun with that. This is an emotional story of trauma and healing that can be very intense at times. That's your blanket

warning, and if you're good with that, then feel free to skip the rest and go meet the boys.

However, if you want to know fully what to expect, so as not to unwittingly happen upon something that could trigger you, click here.

If any of what you've read on my website runs the risk of upsetting you, please be careful proceeding further. Use your best judgement. You know your own limits better than anyone else.

But just know that this is a work of fiction, and ultimately, it's a love story with a happily ever after. The characters go through a lot over the course of the book, but to quote Harvey Dent, the night is always darkest before the dawn. As tough as it gets, I promise it works out for Kyran and Avi in the end.

All of that said, this story is tense, super sexy, and a lot of fun. I've shed buckets of tears for these characters, but none more than for the pure *love* they share.

I hope you fall for them the same way I have.

Log on, and charge up those vibes, friends. Kyran and Avi are stepping on screen…

;)

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KYRAN & AVI'S PLAYLIST

Listen & Like on Spotify!

Say It Ain't So—Weezer
She—Green Day
Time to Pretend—MGMT
Loser Baby—La Bouquet, Oliver the Kid
Youth—Glass Animals
…fuck—Johnny Rain
Sweetness—Jimmy Eat World
drunk face—Machine Gun Kelly
Sexy MF—Labrinth
Paranoid—Point North
I Want It—Two Feet
Side To Side—Ariana Grande, Nicki Minaj
Acquainted—The Weekend
4AM—KID BRUNSWICK
Tell Me Your Secret—Prelow
Alive—Empire of the Sun
Slow Down—Chase Atlantic
Tropic Scorpio—Third Eye Blind
Porn Star—August Alsina
See Through—The Band CAMINO
Cry Baby—The Neighbourhood
Pursuit Of Happiness—Kid Cudi, MGMT
Love On The Brain—Rihanna
Gasoline—Point North
Life Was Easier When I Only Cared About Me—Bad Suns
CALL ME BACK—Chase Atlantic
We Will Rock You—Queen

WE MADE PLANS & GOD LAUGHED—Beauty School Dropout
Swoon—Beach Weather
Black Butterflies and Déjà Vu—The Maine
ALL OUT OF LUCK—Jet Black Alley Cat
First Date—Blink 182
Daphne Blue—The Band CAMINO
Right Here—Chase Atlantic
Kiss It Better—Rihanna
Until I Found You—Stephen Sanchez
Heavenly—Broadside
I'm a Mess—Avril Lavigne, YUNGBLUD
Stay—Ari Abdul
Haze—Sunsleep
I Love U—The Chainsmokers
I'll Be—Edwin McCain

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CHAPTER ONE

AlexandertheBait: My dick died…mind if I bury it in dat ass??

Avi

Have you ever wondered…

There's this recurring dream I've been having for the last few years. I don't have it that often, but every time I do, it's exactly the same.

I'm at the top of a very high building in the city. I'm not sure which one… But from how high it seems in my mind, I'd say maybe the Empire State Building.

My muscles are tight and bunched, my teeth chattering. It's so realistic, I can practically feel the cold breeze rushing through my hair…

There are no guardrails. I'm at the very edge… My toes are hanging over.

And the thing is, I *know* I should back up. I know I should do everything in my power to launch myself backward, away from sudden death.

But it doesn't happen that way.

Every time, like some sort of suicidal Freudian slip… my foot slips.

And I fall.

I'm falling and falling, but not fast. It's slow. Suspended in the air, I float past each of the building's windows. Birds fly by as I spot people inside, going about their business. Sometimes I recognize them.

Mom is usually in there. She looks up and sees me levitating outside her window. And she smiles, which always twists my stomach into knots. She looks *happy*, and I think it's because she doesn't know the truth.

She's blissfully unaware that her son is about to die.

But the thing is, that while I’m in my weightless nosedive, I’m not afraid. The thrill of descent takes over, hypnotic reverie bringing me not to *death*… but to *life*.

I always wake up before I hit the ethereal *ground*, shooting upright in bed with that eerie sensation that you’ve literally been hovering in the air, and when your consciousness snaps back into place, you actually crash back down onto the mattress.

I used to think it was aliens abducting me in my sleep. Or the programming of my simulation. *Could be true.*

But maybe it’s more like a bridge, or a gateway. A door left open by the mind’s eye.

And no matter how scary it can be at first, I just can’t help but wonder…

How it truly feels to fall from up high.

None of this is *literal*, of course. I’m not morose, and I don’t *actually* want to jump off a building. But my subconscious seems fascinated by the idea of floating willingly into something else. Being happy about the fall into the unknown… Laughing and waving to the people in the windows as I plummet.

I know what you’re thinking… *This dude sounds high as fuck.*

It’s a fair assessment, because usually that’s the case. But not right now. In fact, I’m currently itching to get home so I can smokey smoke and erase the memories of yet another stressful day in high school. It’s been three months and I’m still getting used to this place. But to be fair, high school in Brooklyn wasn’t exactly my favorite either.

Three months ago, my lovely mother and I relocated from the city we called home, to a cozy part of the historical northeast you may have heard of—*Boston*. Leaving New York was difficult for me, because I truly loved it there, despite the one very bad memory that prompted us to pack up for a fresh start.

Brooklyn had been Mom’s and my home for my entire life, and more than half of hers. New York City raised me just as much as my parents did.

Three months isn’t enough to forget everything I loved about the city. I miss the loudness, the dirt and grime that everyone pretends isn’t there. The people who don’t give a good God damn what they look like or how others perceive them. New York is a cluttered hub for all of the realest people I’ve ever encountered.

Not that Boston is *bad*. It has its qualities, though we're not even living in Boston, per se. We moved to a small city on the outskirts called Malden.

Starting at a new school, in a new city, is exactly like I imagined it would be; a constant pull on my nerves. Between getting used to Boston and all of its little quirks that make it vastly different from New York, settling into the groove of sophomore year while attempting to make friends and keep up on schoolwork that doesn't interest me in the slightest… it's been a hectic few months.

But I think I'm managing. *Mainly because I met a kid named Kyle who sells me weed.*

All in all, it's been fine, but for someone like me, who's already pretty antisocial as it is, I'm having a bit of trouble making friends and *fitting in*… A skill I've never really excelled at.

I'm kind of a weirdo, and I don't want to have to change myself just to make friends. I'm a strong believer in *it'll happen if and when it happens*. If there are people out there who also love art and emo music from before their time, who fan over cryptids and true crime and Tarantino, then we'll eventually find each other and become friends. Why force it?

Ah, the introvert's paradox. Waiting for other nerds to come to you.

So sure, I haven't made any real friends yet—*except for Kyle*—I'm not doing well in school, and I'm constantly aware of how Boston is so *not* Brooklyn. But still, I won't be deterred. After all, we're here to *Subway start fresh*, and I wouldn't say it's gone as stale as that nasty bread just yet. So I'm optimistic.

My phone buzzes in my pocket while I'm stepping off the bus. I pull it out once I'm across the street, opening Instagram to check a new notification. Walking up the block to our apartment with only peripheral vision on the sidewalk, my eyes are mostly fixed on the direct message.

HollyLang333: Your drawings are so sick *heart eyes emoji*

A tiny smile graces my lips. Until I trip and almost drop my phone because I'm not paying attention to where I'm walking.

Holly is a girl from school. She's in my art class. I thought I was hallucinating when I saw her peeking at one of my sketches earlier… But I guess I wasn't. Because now she's creeping my Instagram profile and messaging me.

Oh snap! Loser Avi hooks one!

I’m excited, because like I said, this never usually happens. Holly is definitely cute, and she actually *smiled* during the few times we’ve exchanged real words, which I have to assume is a good sign. But more than anything, I like that she’s complimenting my art. This whole thing is an ego boost I could definitely use right now. It feels good.

Maybe not floating in my dreams good, but I’ll take what I can get.

Speaking of being up high, that joint, though. Mom’s at work for another hour, so I’ll have time to blaze before she comes home and yells at me about it.

She knows I like to smoke for my anxiety, and she’s not crazy about it, only because Hannah Vega has never done a drug in her entire life—she barely even drinks. I’ve tried explaining to her a million times that weed is legal now, but she just keeps on with that *under eighteen* nonsense.

What difference does that make??

I’m almost eighteen… In two years and one week, but who’s counting?

I really don’t think those two years will make a huge difference in the grand scheme, but I guess parents see it differently.

Mom looks the other way when I come home smelling like weed on weekends. She still gets on me about it, but for some reason, it’s not as much of a capital crime in her eyes to smoke a little gange on Saturday as it is on a school night.

I don’t get it. But apparently, it’s one of those things that only makes sense to moms.

Typing back a causal *thanks* with a smiley face emoji to Holly, I stuff my phone away as I approach the front door to our building, waving at our landlady, Rosemary, who lives across the street. She’s always out there, watering her flowers and mowing her eight-foot patch of grass, wearing this weird straw hat that makes her look like a poorly dressed extra on *Little House on the Prairie*.

Strange lady. I like her. Plus, I’m still not over the accent.

Paahhk the caahhh. Wicked good chowdaahh.

Hilarious.

Taking out my keys, I unlock the door with one hand, using the other to fish a joint and lighter out of my backpack, juggling everything while walking up all the stairs to our third-floor apartment. The second I’m inside, I’ve got the joint between my lips and I’m flicking my lighter over and over, trying to get it to light. *I think maybe it’s time for a new one…*

I finally get it lit as I'm stalking through the living room, toward the door to the back deck. Unfortunately, I come to a fast halt when I find my mother sitting on the couch, staring up at me with her brow raised.

My eyes widen and I quickly pluck the joint from between my lips. "Oh shit… how'd that get there??"

My mom rolls her eyes while I stub the joint out on my tongue. "Avi…"

"What are you doing home so early, mother?" Flashing her my most innocent smile, I bat my eyelashes, really laying on the *look how sweet and adorable your son is* act.

I'm anticipating the admonishing, so I dump my backpack on the floor and just wait for it to come. But when it doesn't, I pay a little more attention to her face. She's smiling, but she looks kind of tense as she pats the couch cushion next to her.

"Come sit, son of mine," she says, calmly. "We need to talk about something…"

Gulp. Okay…

I already don't like this.

My mom is my best friend. That probably makes me sound like a huge loser, but I think we've already established that I am, so if the worn Converse sneaker fits…

It's been just the two of us for a while now. We're all each other has.

As it stands, we communicate openly, so there's never really much need for *serious talks*. But the impression I'm getting from her rigid shoulders and the way she's wide-eyed staring at me is one of an impending *conversation*… One that gives me Dejá vu like a Vietnam flashback.

Mom's eyes overflowing with tears of devastation. "I need to tell you something, Aviel… It's about your father."

"I'll just stand here." I fold my arms over my chest petulantly. As if standing up will make whatever this is less real.

"Aviel, for the love of God, just sit down," she huffs.

"Fine…" I mutter, stepping over to the couch. "But I'm doing it because *I* want to, not because you're telling me to."

She chuckles and shakes her head as I take a seat next to her. "Okay, fine. You're the boss."

My throat is all dry and scratchy as she reaches for my face, brushing her fingers through my dark hair.

"How was school?" she asks, and I squint at her.

“Mom, please. You clearly have something to say, so let’s cut the small talk and just get to the point. You’re stressing me out.”

Showing me a sympathetic look, she tilts her head. “I’m sorry, sweetie. I don’t want you to be upset…” Her voice trails, and I lean in, my skin crawling all over in suspense. “But I have some news.”

“*What* news?” I ask quietly. I’m trying to be patient and let her work up to it, but my fingers are twitching.

She swoops in a breath, letting it out slowly before she hits me with, “I met someone.”

My entire body feels frozen solid, like someone ordered an ice sculpture of a shocked teenager.

I don’t know why, but this is the absolute *last* thing I ever expected her to say.

Mom’s brows knit together while I gawk at her like she just told me she wants to become a rodeo clown. “Avi… are you alright?”

“Uh… what?” My head shakes and I force myself to blink a few dozen times. “Yea, yea. I’m uh… I’m… fine?” I don’t mean for the word *fine* to come out like a question, but I’m just really confused right now.

She met someone…? As in, like, a person*… she wants to…* date*??*

My mother has gone on a few dates over the years, but it’s never led to anything. Usually, she just tells me she’s *going out with a friend*, or something along those lines. She’s never felt the need to sit me down and *talk* to me about it.

My mother shifts. “Okay… because you look kind of pale—”

“So you mean you’re gonna… go on a date with someone, right? That’s fine,” I tell her casually while trying not to fidget.

She clears her throat. “Actually, we’ve already gone out a few times.”

“Oh…” My mind is running in jittery circles, like a hamster on a wheel. “But you didn’t mention anything…”

“I didn’t want to bother you with it until it was serious.” She blinks her deep blue eyes at me.

“Wait… so you’re saying it *is* serious??” My voice croaks out of my throat. “Who is this person?”

“His name is Tom.” The way her face sort of lights up even saying his name tightens my gut.

“*Tom*?” I can’t help the way I scoff. “That’s a stupid name…”

“Aviel.” She glares at me. “That’s rude.”

“Sorry.” I rub my eyes. “I’m just… I’m surprised, that’s all. This is kind of coming out of nowhere… You’ve never sat me down to tell me about you dating before.”

She squeezes my arm. “I know, baby. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to keep it from you, but I just figured with the move and you being busy at school… I wanted to give it a few dates before I told you. To make sure I really liked him.”

I swallow down even more dry uncertainty. “And you do?”

She nods. “Yes. He’s really sweet and smart. And he has a boy your age…”

“Where did you even meet this guy?” I ask, still flabbergasted, but trying not to let it show. I don’t want to be acting like an immature idiot, but this is really throwing me off. “And how did I not notice you’ve been going out on all kinds of dates?”

“He brought his car into the dealership,” she tells me. “He asked me to lunch, and we ended up having lunch a few times. And then a couple dinners…”

“So when you said you were working late…” I mumble, piecing it all together.

“I’m so sorry I lied, Avi,” she whimpers, taking my hand between hers. “It’s just… this is all so new for me. You know I haven’t…” She pauses, her eyes falling to our hands. “I haven’t had a real relationship since your father.”

The way those words sting my chest feels like battery acid pumping through my veins.

My dad died when I was six. It’s been ten years, and my mom hasn’t had a meaningful relationship since. That *sucks*.

I don’t want her to be miserable. She’s still young, after all. Just because she lost the love of her life unexpectedly in a tragic accident, that shouldn’t mean she never gets to be with anyone else.

Granted, I know *literally* nothing about love. I’ve never even had a girlfriend… Unless you count Kelsey Lachlan in sixth grade, who I dated for three days. Or Taylor Nguyen, the girl I used to make out with on occasion back in Brooklyn. And I definitely don’t think I’d count them as anything relationship adjacent.

Really, it’s not that I don’t *want* to date, I just haven’t found anyone who’s swept me away… *The way* Tom *apparently has to my mother.*

“Oh, baby boy, I can see you spiraling,” Mom says, launching herself at me.

She grabs me in her arms and squeezes me tight, brushing her fingers through my hair. It reminds me of when I was little…

When we’d *both* be crying over the loss of my father.

“Mom, I’m not a child,” I grunt, wriggling out of her hold. “And I’m not *fragile*. I can handle you dating. I just wish you didn’t feel like you had to hide it from me…”

“I know, Av,” she squeaks. “You’re such a good son. That’s why I needed to tell you the truth.” She cups my jaw with her slender hand. “It’s just as strange for me to be feeling this way, I promise you.”

Nodding, I take one last heavy gulp, swallowing down my hesitations. It’s not the end of the world that my mom likes a guy. He’s just a *guy*. He’ll never be my father.

“So… you really like him?” I force a smile, and she grins.

I have to say, she looks years younger right now; illuminated by this new relationship. And not that I really want to dwell on these thoughts… but I guess it means this *Tom* person must be important to her.

“I do, Av,” she breathes. “He’s really great. I can’t wait for you to meet him.” My eyes go wide again, and she chuckles. “When you’re ready, of course.”

I let out a slow breath. *For Mom…*

I can be happy for her. I’m sure I can manage… meeting this guy.

And when I do, he’ll have to pass my test. If he’s not good enough for her, then this will be a very different conversation.

Suddenly, something she said sticks out in my mind. “You said he has a son my age?”

She nods enthusiastically. “Yes! I haven’t met him yet. We were waiting to talk to you both first…”

This is something they’ve been planning??

“Mom… How long have you actually been seeing this guy?” I narrow my gaze at her.

She chews on her bottom lip for a second before answering. “It’s been about… two months.”

“Two *months?!*” My eyes are bulging all over again. “We’ve only been living here for three months! Jeez, I guess the sharks are circling the chum here in Boston…”

“Avi!” She glares.

“Okay, fine. The pigs are hunting for truffles.” I grin while she stares at me. “You’re the truffle… ’cause they’re fancy.”

She pinches the bridge of her nose. “How did I make this person…”

My smirk widens.

“Aviel, I told you I’m sorry for keeping it from you,” she goes on, sighing regretfully. “Can you please not make me feel bad about this? It’s a strange situation, for all of us. I mean, Tom is coming out of a nasty divorce… We just wanted to make sure it was something real before we told you boys.”

My stomach clenches like a fist. The way she’s talking… it’s like we’re already a family. The four of us…

Me, Mom, Tom… and this other kid.

Stepbrother??

Whoa… trippy.

I’ve been an only child my whole life. I would have no idea how to be a brother…

“Mother, I have something very serious to ask you,” I mumble, and she gawks at me. “Can I *please* go smoke?”

She lets out a laugh, and it quirks my lips. Despite the unease slinking around inside me, she’s still my mother, and my best friend. *Epic Momma’s Boy, reporting for duty.* As long as we’re still *us*, I’m sure it’ll all work out.

But now I definitely need to mellow before I really do start spiraling.

“Okay…” Mom straightens. “You can go outside on the deck while I start dinner, and I’ll pretend I don’t know what you’re doing out there.”

I grin and stand up. “Thanks, Ma.”

She smiles, her voice stopping me before I can leave the room. “I love you, Avi.”

Pausing with my back to her, I peer over my shoulder to show her a casual smile that feels only a bit stilted. “Love you too, mother.”

On my way outside, with my joint already lit between my lips, tension grips my muscles and unease cradles my thoughts. I don’t want to think that things are about to change drastically, *again*, for the second time in three months…

But tell that to the weed I don’t stop smoking until it’s at my fingertips.

Sedate these rabid thoughts, please.

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CHAPTER TWO

Unicorndicks: God, I would beg you to ruin my life and thank you for it after.

Kyran

I want absolutely no part of this…

Squeezing my eyes shut tight, I try harder to focus on what I'm doing. Push away the nagging thoughts and the frustrations of what I know is coming, and just be *present.*

Her tongue is silky wet in my mouth, hair in smooth strands, threaded between my fingers as I hold on to it, matching her energy. For every suck and gentle nip she gives my lips, I give her one back, reclined on her bed while she grinds her supple curves all over me.

It feels good. *No fucking shit it does*. But I'm still distracted. I don't want to be…

I'd give anything to really *be* in this moment with my girlfriend. But I just can't stop thinking about what I'm supposed to be leaving to go do…

It's bullshit, is what it is.

Attempting to pry my mouth away from Becca's for the third time, I mumble onto her pouty lips. "I really have to go, babe. My dad will freak out if I'm late…"

"Just stay…" she whines, hand sliding in between our bodies, down to my crotch. "I'll make it worth your while."

Is there ever a time when a guy my age is able to decline such an offer? *I don't think so.*

But I don't exactly have a choice here. Tonight is a *special night*, according to my father, and I'm already fucking miserable over it. The last

thing I need is for him to also be shooting me disapproving looks the whole time after I show up disheveled and covered in hickeys.

I don't think Becca was able to plant any visible ones, but I can't be sure just yet.

"As tempting as that sounds"—I grin, kissing her one more time softly while also subtly pushing her off me—"I gotta go. If I piss him off now, I'll wind up grounded for the rest of summer break. And we can't have that… Can we?"

She continues to pout, touching me everywhere with needy fingers. But then she sighs, "No, we can't. Especially because Kim's pool party is in two weeks, and you *have* to see the bathing suit I bought." She flutters her long, fake eyelashes at me. "It's gonna blow you away."

My fingertips dig into her waist a little. "I look forward to it."

One last peck on the lips and I manage to extract myself from her grip, rolling off the bed. I wave and blow her a kiss before darting out of her bedroom, heading downstairs. On my way out the door, I'm shaking my head in annoyance.

I can't believe I have to leave hooking up with my girlfriend to go do this… We have the house to ourselves, for fuck's sake!

Both of Bec's parents work during the day, and now that it's summer vacation, we could do literally whatever we want in her house as long as it's before six. I've been looking forward to having sex with her again. The first time—which was both of our first times—was good, but it was sort of… awkward. Maybe *awkward* isn't the right word…

We were both kind of nervous, I guess. So I've been itching to get back on that horse—*ew, bad analogy*. Practice does make perfect, though. And I'm awesome at most things, so I figure I'll only need to do it a few more times before I become awesome at sex, too.

But *no*. Instead of getting my eager dick back inside my girlfriend, I'm going home on a Friday evening to have dinner with my dad, the woman he's currently screwing, and her son.

I'd rather rip a shot of bleach.

Yet I'm still doing it, because of my pathological need to please authority figures, my father being the main one. Sometimes I wish I could just say *fuck it*. Toss up my middle finger to everything and do what *I* want.

But then I remember that I *need* the order; the structure. It's good for me. Keeps me from thinking about… things.

Shoving those thoughts away, deep in the back of my mind, I walk up the block to the bus stop and wait. I'm usually a pretty patient person, but I am so motherloving *sick* of riding the bus. I can't wait to turn sixteen and finally apply for my driver's license. My dad said if I get straight As my first semester of junior year, he'll buy me a car. There's a goal for this fall that I'll have absolutely no problem achieving.

The bus shows up and I hop on, sitting quietly with my mind thrumming as it drives up Highland Ave. Our house in Somerville is nice… Actually, nicer than the one I grew up in, which was also in Somerville, just across town. I think after the divorce, my father was trying to prove how *fine* he was by buying a better house than the one we lived in when he and my mom were still together.

It's the image. The *portrayal*. Everything needs to look perfect on the outside… no matter how decayed and rotten it is beneath the surface.

Grinding my teeth together, I pull my phone out of my pocket and open the camera. I force a smirk and snap a selfie, posting it to my Instagram account with the caption:

Crushin another day in Somerville. Love my hometown. #blessed

I post it and let out a slow breath.

When the bus comes to a stop, I hop off and wander up the block to my house. Thankfully, I don't see any other cars in the driveway, which means the *guests* probably aren't here yet. *Maybe they cancelled… Maybe we're not doing this stupid fucking dinner and I can hang out with my friends tonight instead of this parental version of waterboarding.*

Unfortunately, when I step inside the house, I smell food cooking, which means a dinner of some kind is happening. I spot Theresa in the kitchen, and I can already tell she's making a fancier meal than what she usually cooks for just Dad and me.

My father doesn't cook, or do really any sort of housework, so when he and my mom split, he hired Theresa to do all that stuff. She's a nice lady, and not that I would ever admit it out loud, but I like having her around. She provides a buffer between my dad and me. A much-needed one.

I don't even want to think about what it would be like if it were just the two of us in this house…

"You're late," my father's gruff voice calls from the den, and my spine stiffens.

"You said five-thirty…" I murmur, turning around slowly.

“And it’s quarter to six.” He lifts his wrist to display his Rolex, as if to make some bullshit point. “That’s what *late* means, Kyran.”

My fist tightens at my side. “Well, they’re not here yet… Right?” He narrows his gaze at me, and I sigh an exhale meant to calm me down. “I was hanging out with Becca.”

His head does a barely visible nod, which means he approves, at least a little. My dad likes Becca, mainly because her family is from Southie, and they’re well-off. Really all that matters to him.

He doesn’t give two shits about personality or interest… If you were raised Irish Catholic in Boston, then you’re alright in Thomas Harbor’s book.

“Go get ready for dinner.” He takes a sip from his glass of Jameson. “They’ll be here shortly.”

There is oh-so much I’d like to say right now, but as usual, I stuff it all down and obey his command, stalking off to the stairs and up to my bedroom.

I just don’t understand why this is even necessary…

My parents have been divorced for three years. My father has dated women, I know he has. I mean, he doesn’t tell me about it, but I know it’s happening. He goes out for the night, dressed in a suit, and usually doesn’t come home until after I’m already asleep.

But that’s just it. I don’t give a shit if he wants to date women. He could fuck his way around the entire Greater Boston Area for all I care.

What I *don’t* want to deal with is having to meet the broads he’s sleeping with. He should just keep it to himself. Why put me through some forced awkward dinner with this woman and her son? *What’s the point??*

My mind flits to my mother while I strip out of my clothes and get redressed in dinner attire. She remarried six months after the divorce was final, and got pregnant only a few months after that. Elena Harbor is now Elena Harbor-*McLaughlin*. She lives in Cambridge with her husband, Paul, and my half-sister, Paige, who I’ve only met once.

I never see my mom anymore, which makes sense. She couldn’t get out of their marriage fast enough. It was like she was itching to escape from him… and me. And the memories of… *everything*. How fast it all deteriorated…

Closing my eyes, I rub them hard with my fingers, causing spots in my vision. Reaching for my phone, I open the camera and aim it at myself,

posing for the perfect shirtless selfie. While I don't plan on posting this one, I still take the picture. And I stare at it afterward, for minutes on end. Examining myself, frame and physique.

I'm in good shape. I have to be, what with football and all. My eyes take in the image of myself on the screen… Dirty blonde hair, perfectly swept back by my fingers, skin slightly tanned from the sun of summer's beginning.

I blink over and over at the guy looking back at me as my heart's rapid thumps steady back into a normal rhythm.

"That's you," I whisper.

"Kyran!" Dad's voice shouts from downstairs, and I flinch myself back to reality.

"Coming!"

Slipping into my button-down, I tuck my phone away in my pocket, take one last look in the mirror, and leave my bedroom.

I'm sure my father is hosting this stupid dinner as yet another image boost for himself. It doesn't *mean* anything…

But in the back of my mind, as I descend the stairs, watching him open the door and greet some stranger, I know it's more than that.

My mother got remarried… She has a new baby, a new family. A new life.

In his eyes, she *won*. And he can't have that.

"Hello, beautiful," my father says with a smile to a short, dark-haired woman.

Beautiful?? Okay, that's… gross.

He kisses her cheek, then motions for her to come inside, which she does, all the while smiling back at him. I already don't like how they're looking at each other. But I'm distracted from the sickening sight of my father swooning over some new lady when a tall kid with dark hair just like hers steps inside behind her.

I'm immediately frozen in scowl on the second to last step.

"Thomas, I'd like you to meet my son, Avi." The woman gestures to the dude, who looks to be my age, same height, similar build… maybe a little slimmer.

She peeks at him, and his mouth twists into a visibly nervous grin as he extends his hand to my father.

“Very nice to meet you, Avi.” My dad shakes the kid’s hand. “And please, just call me Tom.”

“Okay…” The guy—*Avi*—appears to be assessing my father, a protective gaze sliding over him, up and down, while he stands close to his mother. “*Tom*.” His mother elbows him, and he grunts. “Uh, nice to meet you…. also.”

My brow furrows. *Who is this dude?? He seems kind of like an idiot.*

“Kyran,” my father says my name in his normal stern brogue, which has me hesitantly stomping off the final steps and over to them. “This is Hannah Vega, and her son, Avi.” He shoots me a look, and I straighten, holding out my hand.

“Hi,” I mutter, miserable and not really able to hide it. “Kyran. Nice to meet you both.”

“Hello, Kyran.” Hannah smiles while shaking my hand. And as much as I hate to admit it, she seems nice. Her voice is soft and melodious, and she *is* beautiful. Olive skin and long, dark hair. Mediterranean look. “I’ve heard so much about you.”

Her pearly white teeth almost blind me, as does her pleasantness. But when I release her hand and turn to her son, for some reason, all I feel is hostility.

“Sup.” He grins at me, displaying some vast dimples.

My teeth grind together. “Hey.” I shake his hand, hard, squeezing it tight. You know, to let him know who’s boss around here.

My dad… But also, me.

A few heavy seconds go by where we’re both sizing each other up. Well, *I’m* sizing *him* up. He seems to be just observing me, in a way that feels appraising and makes my neck hot.

Shifting away from him, I’m attempting to be polite as I ask, “Would you like something to drink?”

I’m mostly talking to Hannah, but I can’t help how my eyes flit to Avi briefly, just to see what he’s doing. He’s not even looking at me anymore. Now, his gaze is darting all over the inside of our house.

Hm… Easily distracted and dopey. Like a puppy.

“Sure, thank you,” Hannah responds to my offer, but looks to my father. “I’ll have whatever you’re having.”

He takes her by the arm. “Come. I have a fantastic bottle of Bordeaux we can open.”

Ugh. Barf. I already hate this.

The two of them wander off, leaving Avi and me standing around like morons. Avi's eyes linger on my father and his mother for a moment, that same protective glint in them, while mine slide over him once more, noting his clothes. He's wearing black skinny jeans with rips on the knees, worn Converse sneakers, and a charcoal V-neck t-shirt that hugs his torso.

I puff my chest a bit. *I could take him.*

"There's, like, soda and stuff in the kitchen if you want…" I mumble, genteel enough, though I really have no interest in engaging with this dude. I can already tell we have little to nothing in common just from looking at him, and now more than ever, I'm seeing this evening for what it is…

A big fat fucking waste of time.

"We don't get any wine?" he asks, and when I grimace, he chuckles. "Just kidding. Wow, lighten up." He slaps me hard on the back, then walks away, in the direction of the kitchen.

I feel my scowl becoming a permanent feature on my face.

My father and Hannah are giggling in the den. And if my teeth weren't crumbling as it is from how tightly my jaw is clenched, when I get to the kitchen, I find Avi making himself at home. Opening our refrigerator, rifling around, pulling out a can of Coke. He cracks it open and takes a sip, making one of those *ah* noises afterward as he leans up against the counter.

It takes me a moment to notice that my fists are balled at my sides.

"So… what's your deal?" he asks me, and my brows crush together in confusion and irritation.

"*Deal*?" I scoff. "I have no deal. What's *your* deal?"

He grins. It annoys the fucking shit out of me.

His eyes slide over me again, a slow traipse up and down. And as much as I have this frustrating urge to wrap my arms around myself, I stand up straight and let him do it, squinting at him all the while.

"You look pretty preppy," he says casually. "Are you, like, a jock or something?"

Forcing myself to swallow down the rage that's building inside me, faster than the usual rate, I grumble, "I play football, if that's what you're asking…"

He huffs. "Figures."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean—"

The question is barely finished barking out of my mouth when Theresa rounds the corner into the kitchen. “Alright, kiddo. As much as I love you bothering me while I’m trying to cook, I need you to move. You’re taking up too much space.” She pauses with a wooden spoon in her hand when she notices the stranger in the room. “Oh, hello. Who’s this now?”

Avi smiles at her, and I roll my eyes. *Why does he smile so much? It makes him look deranged.*

“This is Avi…” I mutter. “His mother is… dating Dad. Allegedly.”

Theresa’s eyes fling back and forth between the two of us, her brow raising for a split second before she offers a polite smile to Avi.

“Well, nice to meet you, Avi,” she says. “I’m Theresa. But you can just call me *The Help*.”

Avi laughs. And then they high-five each other. Like they’ve known each other for years.

The way this whole experience is boiling my blood feels very toxic, but I can’t help it. I don’t like what’s going on here. It’s one thing for my father to bring over this woman and her goofy son, but now they’re waltzing around like they own the place, befriending *my* Theresa…

I hate everything about this.

At that moment, my dad comes into the room with Hannah, *holding hands*, and croons, “Why don’t I give you two a tour of the house…”

He’s actually smiling, for the first time in what feels like my entire life. And he sounds *happy*.

What kind of fresh hell is this??

“Dinner will be ready in ten,” Theresa announces.

“Perfect.” Dad smiles down at Hannah, and she up at him.

And my veins are sizzling.

My father proceeds to bring Hannah and Avi all around the house, showing them things while they *ooh* and *aah* like they’ve never seen a house before. And I’m just following behind them the whole time, seething.

I really don’t want to be jealous of these new people. I *hate* feeling jealousy, because I’m usually able to portray exactly enough confidence and self-assurance to thwart such emotions. But I can’t help the little green monster inside me right now.

The way my dad is acting, it’s as if he’s been miserable for years, and now he’s *finally* happy again, thanks to Hannah Vega and her smiling, dimpled-dimwit son. Not only does that make me feel like utter shit, but

also, Hannah is so epically *different* from my mom, and my father's usual type. Granted, I don't know her well, but just watching her and listening to her speak proves my point. She's nothing like my mom, and my dad seems elated by it.

We're done perusing the upstairs, and my father and Hannah are walking downstairs chatting when Avi leans in to me and whispers, "Your room is really boring."

And then he clomps down the steps, leaving me standing there, seconds away from tackling him to the ground. *What the hell is wrong with this guy?? Does he have no manners whatsoever? We just met, for fuck's sake, and he's just throwing shade at me like some kind of cocky emo-douche.*

My mood is more sour than a lemon wedge in my mouth as we all sit down around the dinner table. Theresa serves us, then scuttles off, leaving us to eat under a bubble of awkward tension.

I would've been fine pushing my food around in silence, but unfortunately, my father decides to make conversation.

"So, Avi, how are you liking Malden High?"

Avi looks up at him, chewing for a few generous seconds while blinking his wide eyes like he's trying to figure out how to answer the question.

"It's alright." He fiddles with his fork. "My art class is pretty cool."

"Avi prefers the arts," Hannah says, peeking at her son. "Trying to get him to hold an interest in anything else has always been… difficult."

My eyes shift to Avi. At a dig like that from *my* parents, I'd be cowering inside. But he doesn't seem disturbed by it at all. He simply shrugs and grins, popping another bite of chicken into his mouth.

"Oh…" my father utters, and I brace myself for him to go off on a tangent about how important education is, and how getting good grades will get you into a good school, *blah blah blah*. I've heard it a million times. But instead, he says, "Well, I'm sure you'll find your footing soon. At least you have something you're passionate about."

I nearly do a spit-take with my mouthful of soda.

"Kyran does well in school," he goes on. "But his main passion is football. Isn't that right, son?"

He shows me a pleasant smile, which I balk at. *Who the hell are you, and what have you done with my borderline fascist father??*

"Yea," I grunt through my bewilderment. "Football is great."

Avi smirks at me. "Let me guess, you're the quarterback."

I purse my lips. Because he's right… I *am* the quarterback. And I'm proud of it, but for some reason, I don't want to give him the satisfaction of feeling like he knows me after only a few minutes.

Thankfully, my father does it for me. "Yes, he is!" Dad says proudly. "He's in line to make varsity next year. Then he'll be playing for a scholarship to BC."

"Oh, wow!" Hannah gasps with zeal. "Boston College football… Isn't that exciting, Avi?"

"I wouldn't say *exciting*…" Avi shrugs again while eating.

"Avi was looking into BC also," Hannah tells us.

Avi's head springs up. "I was??"

She ignores him, speaking more to my father than anyone else. "They have a great art program."

Dad nods along. "I've heard that. Somerville High also has some great art classes, though Ky isn't exactly interested in that. It's all about football, which is why we chose the public school over private. Their team wasn't exactly on par…"

Oh, yea. Sure, Dad. That's *why we chose the public school.*…

"BC sounds just great," Hannah sighs.

My dad grins. "Wouldn't it be fun if you two went to the same place?"

It seems like he's asking us, but he's not looking at us at all. His eyes are only on Hannah, and I've completely lost my appetite. He's trying so hard to impress her, and it's making me nauseous.

"Can I be excused?" I gripe.

"Absolutely not. We just sat down," Dad barks quietly without looking at me. "So, tell us all about New York, you two. What was it like living in Brooklyn?"

I… don't… care. I have to fight the urge to drop my face onto my plate.

Hannah regales us with the story of their life in Brooklyn before they moved here last year. And I'm assuming that my dad already knows most of these details, but he still seems swept away by listening to her speak.

Apparently, her husband passed away years ago, but she doesn't go into what happened, and it has my curiosity sort of piqued. Until she mentions where she's really from…

Hannah was born in Israel. She left there when she was young and moved to Lebanon with some family before immigrating to the States when she was eighteen. From what I'm gathering, she's never really gotten along

well with her family, but when she married her late husband, who was Spanish, I guess she was sort of shunned from their community.

I'm finding her history pretty fascinating, but I can barely even pay attention to that because my mind is too busy reeling over the fact that *my father*, who was raised strictly Irish Catholic, is dating a Jewish woman.

I never thought I'd see the day.

I guess Hannah and Avi don't practice Judaism at all. They both mention that they're more spiritual than religious, which is also too much for me to unpack right now. I'm just *baffled* that my father is going along with this…

My father, Thomas Harbor… Who brought me to Catholic church my *whole* life. Had me and my sister baptized and had me go through communion… Who sent me to church camp until I was twelve and forced me to be an altar boy…

My hands are growing awfully sweaty, and I have to keep rubbing my palms on my jeans. Sure, I haven't set foot in a church in years. But my father still considers himself a die-hard Catholic.

The whole thing is making my head spin, among other things… But now more than ever, I just want this meal to be over. I have a pounding migraine coming on, and I'm sick of feeling all shredded up inside while the kid across the table from me sits there and grins casually, like he doesn't have a care in the goddamn world, in *my* house.

By the time we're done with dinner and dessert, I'm practically running out onto the back deck for some air. I need to be alone for a few, to clear my head. Everything feels so congested.

I only get about three minutes to myself before I hear someone stepping outside behind me.

"You have a nice place." The grungy male voice stiffens my spine and forces me to peer over my shoulder. "Somerville seems cool."

"Why? Where do *you* live?" I scoff, like a snob, but I can't help it. I'm not in the mood to be talking to him.

"Malden," Avi says, either not picking up on my attitude because he's an airhead, or choosing to ignore it because it doesn't affect him. *I've decided it's the former.* "We're just in an apartment for now… It's okay, but I'd like to have more room. Like this—"

"Well, guess what." I spin to face him. "You're not getting it. I don't know what you think… If you and your mom are just looking for someone

with money to support you or something, but it’s not gonna happen. Go find some other family to leech onto and leave us alone.”

A flash of what might be vulnerability shines in his eyes, rippling their grayish version of light blue. I’m not trying to focus on it, but it’s just happening.

The sting of my comment wears off quickly, and Avi pulls one of his blithe little smirks he’s been wearing all night.

He steps over to me slowly. “Don’t worry, superstar. I wouldn’t be caught dead associating with your preppy ass.” Stuffing his hands into his pockets, he leans in. “Bad for my image.” Then he winks, twirls around, and leaves me standing out on the deck alone…

Desperately clinging to some truth in his words.

It won’t last.

There’s no way…

The high will wear off and my dad will come to his senses.

This isn’t permanent.

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CHAPTER THREE

DarthKittyVader: 10/10 I would let those hands be my necklace.

6 Months Later…

*W**elp*, the unthinkable happened…

Tom proposed to my mother. And she actually said *yes*.

He did it on Thanksgiving. We had dinner at his house, just the four of us…

Me, Mom, Thomas Harbor, and his football-playing jerk-wad of a son, *Kyran*.

I was already annoyed at having Thanksgiving with people other than my mother for the first time since I was a little kid. Even more so, having it with people I don't really care for all that much. But then after dinner, while we were all sitting around the den, having pumpkin pie like some kind of new little family, Tom dropped onto one knee and fucking *proposed* to my mother.

All summer, I'd really been trying to stay positive about the whole thing. I never want to rain on my mom's parade, mainly because she's spent so many years depressed and kind of lonely after the death of my father. But the proposal just smacked me in the face. And I wasn't the only one…

The word *yes* was barely out of my mother's mouth before Kyran got up and stormed off. Tom went after him, and we heard them yelling for a few minutes while I just sat there quietly, forcing an uneasy smile and telling Mom that I was *happy for her*.

When Tom returned, he said, “He’ll come around. Ky just needs time to adjust. He took the divorce pretty hard…”

My mother comforted him, like *he* was the one who was upset, and we didn’t see Kyran again for the rest of the night.

My head spun for days on end after that. Because even though they hadn’t told us outright how big things would be changing, I just knew it was true. My mother, my best friend and the only person I have in this world, was getting remarried. Moving to Boston was just the beginning…

Apparently, I was getting a whole new family dynamic, and I had no choice but to get on board with it. And sure enough, the changes came on like rapid-fire after that.

Over Christmas break, we moved into Tom and Kyran’s house in Somerville. And now, I’ve officially resumed my junior year at *yet another* new school… Somerville High.

The school thing isn’t the biggest deal for me. I’m really not a fan of high school anyway, and it’s not like I had much time to grow accustomed to Malden, since I was barely there for a full school year. But Holly took it kind of hard…

She had sort of become my *girlfriend*, only in the sense that I lost my virginity to her. We were never even really an official item, and I know it sounds bad to say, but I think she liked me more than I liked her. Not that I *didn’t* like her, or that I don’t, but I never got butterflies being with her.

Don’t get me wrong, losing my virginity was cool and all, but it seemed more like something I was *supposed* to do… Not something that made me feel weightless.

We agreed to stay in touch when I left Malden. In theory, I guess I could have kept dating her, since I’m only a town over. But it just didn’t seem realistic at my age to come to a new school with a girlfriend. And that probably goes to show how little I was invested in the *relationship,* because it would have been pretty easy to keep dating Holly. The whole thing makes me feel like a jerk, and I don’t like that.

It’s all Tom’s fault.

He’s the one who swept my mother off her feet in record time. *He’s* the one with the big fancy house in Somerville, within the new school district, so transferring me was easier than keeping me at Malden High. *He’s* the one with the son who clearly hates my guts without even making the slightest effort to get to know me.

Kyran is a dick, and that's putting it mildly. I'm not used to having siblings as it is, and now I've been saddled with one who's nothing like me, and who spends every interaction we have scowling at me like I pissed in his Raisin Bran.

I wish it wasn't just us… Like, if there was another sibling to maybe soften the blow. Kyran has an older sister, Bridget, but I guess she left home after the divorce and went to school in California. I can't say I don't get it… *Putting distance between me and the ray of sunshine known as Kyran Harbor* does *seem like a fun concept.*

But I can't do that. I refuse to leave my mother, which is why the meeting with my guidance counselor to talk about college applications revolved around me applying to all schools in the Boston area.

It's just after lunch, and I'm on my way to art class when I hear a symphony of raucous laughter that grates in my ears like a particularly terrible song. *Ever heard "Hollaback Girl" by Gwen Stefani?*

I refuse to look their way, but there's a group of football players exiting the locker room, shoving each other around like testosterone-fueled jocks tend to.

In their own little world. Nothing and no one else matters…

"Fuck!" I grunt when one of them bumps right into my shoulder, *hard*. Hard enough that I drop my art book on the floor, papers scattering out, all across the hallway.

Tipping my chin, I aim a seething glare in the direction of their brood. And go figure… the one who bumped me is none other than the asshole I now share a bathroom with.

"Oops." Kyran smirks over his shoulder at me while walking away, preppy fuckhead that he is.

Then he proceeds to step right *on* my drawings, laughter continuing on amongst him and his stupid fucking friends. My jaw is clamped as I bend to pick up my stuff, quickly stuffing papers back into my book while Kyran and his pals high-five each other.

"*Okay*… That was totally on purpose," I mumble to myself, deliberately ignoring them.

"Oh my God, what a fucking loser!" One of the other jocks cackles. "Is that manga??"

This time, I can't *possibly* keep my mouth shut. "If it's so lame, why do you know what it's called?" My lips curl as I tilt my head in his direction.

The dumb dope's face drops, and he looks embarrassed. *Point one for me.*

"Please. It's a standard for art nerds," Kyran speaks up, narrowing his gaze at me. "You're all the same. Drawing big-titted girls you could never get in a million years."

They laugh some more.

"Forgive me, I'm working on memory," I growl at him. "I've only met your mom once."

My evil smirk grows as Kyran's fists clench, and he turns to stomp back in my direction.

"The *fuck* did you just say to me??" he hisses, and I stand up.

Fuck it. If he wants a fight, I'm game. Sure, I've never fought anyone before… but how hard could it be to throw a punch? I've been working out more lately… Maybe I could just hit him and run.

"Hey, enough." A female voice stops us, and I pry my fuming gaze away from Kyran long enough to notice a small, pink-haired girl stepping in between us.

My shoulders drop back as Kyran does the same, his friends grabbing him and tugging him away from our potential throw-down. He shoots me one last angry scowl before returning to his dumb jock friends. Keeping my wicked grin intact, I turn to the girl who's helping me.

"Ignore them," she says, bending to pick up the rest of my drawings. "Clearly the steroid injections are still fresh."

I chuckle, eyeing her while she straightens. I've seen this girl around… In fact, she's in my art class. But I've only been here a few weeks, so I barely know anyone's names yet. Other than the asshat I live with, who seems hard-pressed to make my time in this school a living hell already.

"Thanks for that," I murmur as she hands me my drawings. "I won't say I wouldn't have thrown a few punches their way, but getting my ass kicked by a band of jockstrap-wearing dickheads probably wouldn't be great for my reputation as the *new kid*."

She laughs and shakes her head. "Yea, probably not."

I take her in for a moment. She's really pretty, and visibly different from most of the other girls at this school. Bronze skin tone and a Colgate smile, fashionably ripped clothes and bright pink hair, piercings in her lip and nose, even a few visible tattoos on her hands.

She looks *cool*. And maybe just the right amount of anti-establishment for us to bond over being weirdos. *I'm in.*

"These are really good, by the way." Her eyes fall to my art book. "I have to admit, I've peeped some of your stuff in class. I like your style."

"Really?" I can't help but grin wide. "Thanks. I'm still sort of trying to find my niche…"

"Your portraits are sick. And I love all this detail." She points to one of my sketches I started yesterday, of a girl and a guy holding hands as they're beamed up into a spaceship. "I'm Frankie."

I shift my book to shake her hand. "Avi. It's nice to meet someone cool around here… You know, someone who isn't all about football and cheerleading."

"Well, don't get me wrong, I love football." She smiles. "The games, mostly. I'm in the band."

"Oh, that's awesome," I tell her excitedly. "So you really are the hot-nerd needle in a preppy haystack?"

Frankie's head dips back in a laugh that warms my gut. She has this sultry rasp to her voice that I like. "There are more of us, don't worry. Hang with me, kid. I'll show you how to survive this school."

I'm so excited to be making a *friend* that I end up nodding along and mindlessly following her like a pet.

Maybe this new school won't be so bad after all…

When I get home, the house is empty.

It's a relief, for sure, since I'm not in the mood to watch my mom and Tom make googly eyes at each other while blathering about wedding plans. And I'm *definitely* not in the mood to see my douchebag almost-stepbrother after what happened at school today.

I'm telling you… I'm *really* trying to keep a positive outlook here. But the idea of even calling that guy my *stepbrother* is making me want to die. He's just such a *snob*.

Mr. Perfect Football Quarterback, with his perfect grades, and his stupid ironed clothes with no holes in them. Jock body and perfectly coiffed

hair… laughing at people who are different with his idiot friends…

I scoff to myself upstairs to my bedroom. *Milktoast motherfuckers.* They all look the same and dress the same. Sports are their whole personality, it's pathetic. Actually, it's all so predictable, I could retch *for* them.

They date the same rich cheerleaders, who are eerily similar to their own waspy mothers. *Totally creepy.* They peak in college and end up in the same boring marriages their parents had… The once hot-stuff *popular* girls become white-wine-and-Xanax-guzzling zombies, and the football *all-stars* get stuck in dead-end corporate jobs, then end up cheating with their secretaries until they're slapped with a sexual harassment lawsuit. Get divorced, then prey on the moms of unsuspecting emo nerds like me.

And the cycle repeats itself.

"Bleh…" I grumble, meandering into my room and tossing my backpack onto the bed. "*Cool* kids… Kill me now."

Rustling in my secret desk drawer, I pull out some weed and rolling papers. *Okay…* So I don't *know* for certain that's what happened with Tom and his wife. But it wouldn't surprise me. Not one bit.

Closing my eyes for a moment, I shake my head. I want to give him the benefit of the doubt. I want to see my mom *happy*. But it's just so easy to be skeptical when these people are so very different from us.

I mean, these aren't blue-collar people. They're Irish Catholics from Southie.

No wonder Kyran hates me so much… I'm a mutt in his eyes.

Alright, that's not fair either. He's not a racist or anything. He's a jerk, there's a difference. And I don't want to spend another minute obsessing over all this crap.

It's toking time.

Sticking the joint between my lips, I light it and take a long drag, grabbing a nearby can of Febreze and spraying it everywhere. I go for my backpack, pulling out my Spanish homework. It makes me smile. For only a moment, before I'm smacked upside the head by reality once more.

My father… He used to speak Spanish to me when I was little. Before he died.

I was six years old when Arlo Vega was taken from this world. He worked construction for the city. And one day, there was a terrible accident

on the job site, and he fell from some scaffolding that wasn't properly secured.

My father plummeted to his death from over a hundred feet. Dead on impact.

It's that level of hurt, internal scars and a lifelong pain to overcome, that I'm not sure Thomas or Kyran Harbor, with their cushy life, could ever understand.

A loud thump snaps me out of it. Like a reflex, I stub my joint out on my tongue and tuck everything away in my drawer, in case it's Mom or her *fiancé*. But when I hear footsteps clomping upstairs, I realize that it's neither of them. It's someone worse. Someone angry.

A muffled voice comes from outside my bedroom door, the steps making their way into the other room just up the hall. I listen as Kyran slams his bedroom door, talking to someone, likely on the phone.

"It's only for one more year…" I hear his voice through my door to our shared bathroom. "I already talked to Principal Brown, and he said there are forms you can fill out so I can still attend Somerville while technically residing in Cambridge. The school districts are—"

His voice cuts out like he's been interrupted, and I creep over to eavesdrop a little better.

"I know. I *know* that, Mom, but I'm begging you." He actually sounds distraught. It kind of humanizes the enemy a little. For once, he's not being a cocky, brooding asshole. "I just can't… I don't want to be here. Can I *please* come live with you??"

My mouth drops open. I can't believe what I'm hearing…

He's pleading with his mother to let him come live with her… *To get away from me??* I mean, I'm guessing that's what's happening. Why else would he be suddenly desperate to move out of the home he's lived in for years?

Kyran is quiet for a few heavy moments, while I'm trying not to make any noise so I can keep spying.

Then I hear him release a ragged breath. "Okay… fine. Whatever. Have a nice life then."

I think the call is over when I hear him growl out loud. A crash causes me to jump, like he threw something against a wall. I hear more stomping and shuffling, and the hit of this decent sativa strain is filling me with the energy needed to call him out.

He’s over there, huffing and puffing because he has to live with me, like it’s some form of torture, when *he’s* the one who’s been treating *me* like shit since we met. It’s not fair. I’m not thrilled about this arrangement either, but at least I’m making an effort.

When I hear his aggressive movements enter our shared bathroom, I make my move, whipping open the door and shouting, “Aha!”

Not sure why I chose to say that… But I don’t even have time to dwell on it.

Because Kyran is ass naked.

He scrambles to cover his dick, eyes wide, face reddening as it contorts in shock and appall. “What the fuck are you doing?!”

“Uh, my bad…” I mutter, looking away while he grabs a towel and hastily secures it around his waist.

“Why are you bursting into the bathroom while I’m naked, you fucking creeper?!” he growls, baffled rage framing his voice.

Allowing myself to peek again when I’m sure he’s covered-up, I find him glaring at me, sandy-brown hair all tousled and his cheeks flushing crimson.

I clear my throat. “I um…” My brain has gone blank. *Why did I come in here again?? Oh, right…* I straighten. “I heard what you said… Begging your mom to let you live with her…” I fold my arms over my chest. “Sort of desperate to get away from me, hm?”

His jaw ticks. “Yea. Now more than ever.”

“That’s kind of rude.” I match his glare with one of my own.

“Oh, and eavesdropping on people’s conversations, then bursting in on them in the bathroom isn’t??” His brow arches, and I shrug.

Okay, I guess he has a point…

Letting out a breath, I rub my eyes with my fingers. “Alright, I’ll give you that. But you were talking loud. I couldn’t help but overhear…”

“Right…” he scoffs, rolling his eyes as he turns away, fussing with things on his side of the vanity.

“Look, Kyran…” I shift to face him fully. “This is just as weird for me as it is for you, trust me.”

“Yea, I doubt that,” he hisses.

“No, I’m serious. I’m not used to living with anyone other than my mom. And I’m definitely not used to having a brother… Especially one I just met, who I’m now sharing a school and a bathroom with.”

“You’re *not* my brother,” he teems, peering at me.

I release a frustrated sigh. “Yea, well… they’re getting married. Whether we like it or not, it’s happening. So don’t you think we should, I don’t know… make an effort? To at least *try* to get along? For them…”

Kyran is quiet for a moment, staring at himself in the mirror with a strange look in his eyes. They usually appear to be a green and bronze hazel, but right now they’re dark, pupils visibly large, noticeable even from where I’m standing.

I witness him swallow before he grips onto the edge of the countertop. “I don’t owe him anything.”

I narrow my gaze at him. *What the hell does that even mean?*

This time, he twirls to face me, pinning me with a particularly severe glower. “Who my father decides to marry is his business. But as far as I’m concerned, you and your mother are simply people I have to tolerate until I graduate and can get the fuck away from all of you.”

“Wow…” I breathe and swallow. “Mean.”

“It’s the truth.” He stands firm, his broad chest moving up and down, struggling to contain his anger. “I don’t need any more friends, and I sure as shit don’t need a *brother* who’s nothing like me.”

I blink. “You don’t even know me.”

“Oh, but I do.” He inches closer. “You’re the stoner kid who laughs it all off because it’s easier than admitting you have no clue who you really are. Nothing holds your attention, and you tell yourself it’s because of your *artist brain*, but that’s just an excuse to slack off and flit around like a careless buffoon. You have no friends, no relationship, *nothing*. You’re a momma’s boy, and you act like you’re taking care of her, but the truth is that she doesn’t need you. *No one* does.” I’m frozen as he leans in even closer to my face. “You’re a waste of space. Now, get the fuck away from me. Please, and thank you.”

I’m fucking stunned into stone. Harsh adrenaline rushes in my veins, my stomach twisting and turning so violently I feel like I could vomit.

I can’t believe he just said that shit to me… What kind of horrendous asshole is this kid??

Muscles tense all over my body and my fists ball on a hoarse whisper, “Alright, then. I guess fuck you too.”

Stalking out of the bathroom, I slam the door so hard behind me, it rattles the wall. I exhale out loud, shaking my head and pretending his

words didn’t get to me. That he’s just lashing out because he’s a stuck-up asshole who thinks he’s better than everyone.

But no matter what I do, I can’t get his voice out of my head.

No matter how much more I smoke, it just won’t go.

You have no one…

No one needs you…

I spend the rest of the night struggling to focus on my homework. And when Mom and Tom come back with dinner, I tell them I’m not hungry.

I stay locked away in my bedroom, staring at the pages of the books I’m not reading, with a hurtful truth bounding around in my brain.

You have… no… clue… who you really are.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Tumultuous_ho3b4g: I'm not feeling myself today. Can I feel you instead?

Kyran

One Year Later…

The muscles in my arms are tight, fighting the tremble.

They burn as I push with all my might, lifting the barbell up, then controlling it back down. My chest strains, sweat lining my forehead. I puff breaths on each push as my partner counts.

Twenty-five. Twenty-six.

My mind is clear while I focus on the hurt. The pain of the weight I'm holding…

It feels good. The ache is like a companion, a comforting presence that strokes my hair and whispers to me.

You're so strong.

There's nothing you couldn't rip apart with your bare hands.

Garrison, who's spotting me, says *thirty,* then helps me guide the bar back into the uprights, before I'm even done.

I would've kept going… But I guess thirty reps of this much weight is more than you're normally supposed to do.

Weaklings. Give me more. I can take it.

Sitting up slowly, I wipe sweat from my brow while Garrison slaps me on the shoulder.

"Nice work, killa," he rumbles his support.

"Fuckin' show-off," my friend Marcus says with a smirk from across the room.

He’s only doing one-fifty. *I guess he doesn’t need pain the way I do…*

Grabbing my towel, I sling it around my neck, getting up and stretching my arms over my head. I sip some water, glancing around the weight room at my teammates. I’m going to miss this…

College football will be similar, but also different. I’ll have to get used to all new players. Form bonds of camaraderie with new dudes.

Playing for the Eagles will be intense, but honestly, I’m looking forward to it. The football field has always been the place where I shine. I play because I’m good at it, but also because I need it. Football is the biggest part of my image.

“So, Ky…” Garrison says my name, and I peer at him. “You break up with Becca yet?”

A few of the guys laugh. And my chin dips. “No…”

“Come on, man.” He chuckles. “You gotta rip that shit off like a Band-Aid.”

“It’s gonna be so damn awkward.” I run my fingers through sweaty strands of my hair. “She’s going to Emerson… It would be like, really easy for me to stay with her.”

“But you don’t want to…?” Marcus blinks up at me from where he’s sitting on the weight bench.

“Uh, no.” I roll my eyes. “I mean, Becca’s cool and all, but BC will be a sea of new pussy.”

“You got that right.” Mack, one of my other teammates, grins wickedly. “And QB of the Eagles is guaranteed to have you drowning in it.”

I shove off the smile that wants to curve my mouth. “If I get QB…”

“Bro… you’re gonna get it.” Garrison slaps my arm. “Manifest destiny, homie.”

I can’t help the amusement on my face that leads me to chuckle.

“Man, what the fuck are you talking about?!” Marcus cackles at him.

“It’s a thing! I’m telling you!” Garrison defends himself.

He’s always been the hippy of the group.

“And, not to mention that Lexi is going to BC…” Mack shoots me another devious look.

“Hm…” I nod along, not really knowing how to react to that.

Lexi Erikson is this girl who lives in Everett. She’s fuckhot, and sometimes shows up at parties in Somerville, at which point all the guys

drool over her, stalking around her like a bunch of territorial lions looking to mate with the only lioness.

I didn't know Lexi had gotten accepted to BC. We follow each other on Instagram, but we've never really talked much. *She cheers in Everett… Maybe she'll cheer for the Eagles.*

My fuzzy mind springs back to Becca, and my stomach starts flopping, bringing on a wave of nausea. I need to just break up with her, but it'll be hard. We've been together for a while at this point. We've said the *I love you* words, although for me they were just that. Words.

I think she actually meant them.

My mind is stuck on this while we all make our way into the showers, the guys still laughing, joking and fucking around in the background of my internal dilemma. If I could love someone, I'm sure it *should* be Becca. On paper, she's perfect for me. Beautiful, smart, similar background… My dad likes her.

But I just don't feel it. I don't *know* what love feels like. And at my age, I'm a little worried that I've never felt something more than a basic shell of attraction to any girl. Most of the guys I know either have girlfriends, or have been through relationships where they say they were *in love*, even if they try to be macho and downplay it. Still, it's obvious they felt *something* for these girls…

But not me. My chest is hollow any time I think about love. Like a simple circle; an outline, with no solid substance to fill me up.

I might be broken… And the thought brings on a scratchy sensation, crawling up my esophagus like claws.

Moving in front of the mirror, I stare at myself for a second, willing down panic I can't display in front of these guys. Fingers digging into the counter, I close my eyes and take a deep breath. When I reopen them, I lock eyes with myself.

You're here. This is you.

More laughter tugs me out of it as all the guys strut around naked behind me. Swallowing still feels thick, but I push through the discomfort, just like when I'm lifting, and I join them.

I've always made it a point to move quickly in the locker room showers. It's not exactly a place you wanna get caught lingering anyway. I'm obviously pretty comfortable with my body and all, but I'll admit,

sometimes the nonchalance of showering next to a bunch of other naked dudes feels tense.

Nothing to dwell on. Lather, rinse, and move it along.

When I'm done with my two-minute shower, I hop out and get dressed. And it's while this is happening that I make a decision. I need to go find Becca and end it. It's the right thing to do.

Like Garr said, rip off the Band-Aid.

I think she's still here, at school. She's on the Graduation Committee, and they've been meeting pretty much every day after school since graduation is only a couple of weeks away. Nodding to the guys, I stuff down the impending doom of how she's going to take this and storm out of the locker room.

Outside of the cafeteria, where they usually have the Grad Committee meetings, I pace for a few jittery seconds, before taking a deep breath and pushing through the doors. I spot the group of them, sitting at a table, chatting. But I notice right away that Becca isn't there.

A few of the kids look up as I approach, and I give them a polite smile. "Hey, guys."

"Kyran… Hi," Julie chirps, shooting me this sort of wide-eyed look that has my brows zipping together for a moment.

"Is Bec here?" I look around.

"Uh… no." She peeks at Josh by her side. "She went to get her charger."

"Her charger…" I repeat, eyeing them and wondering why they're acting so shifty.

"With Ash," Josh says, and Julie elbows him.

"With Ash?" I narrow my gaze.

They're both just staring at me, nodding. A pit is forming in my stomach, but I ignore it, muttering, "Thanks," while I spin and stomp away, back toward the doors.

"I'm sure she'll be right back!" Julie shouts after me, but I'm not listening.

I'm going to find my girlfriend. Right now.

Stalking the halls, I'm tense. The charger story is obviously bullshit, because the halls are empty and she's not at her locker. I check every room, frantically searching while my mind spins and spins, until finally, I hear voices coming from the music room.

Peeking through the small window in the door, I spot Becca, and Ash. They're just talking, and my shoulders drop, a relived chuckle puffing as I shake my head. I can't believe I just started panicking over nothing.

Nope… Not nothing.

Ash leans in, smiling while pressing a slow kiss on my girlfriend's lips. Her hand runs up onto his jaw, fingers threading in his shaggy black hair as she kisses him back. Like she *wants* it.

She's not pushing him away… They're just standing there, out in the fucking open, making out like she doesn't have a care in the world or a goddamn *boyfriend* who's looking for her so he can break her heart.

My jaw strains as I reach for the door handle, ready to whip it open and storm inside to kick that loser prick's ass.

But I pause. And my hand falls by my side.

"Fuck it…" I mutter to myself, turning away.

Of course I'm pissed that my girlfriend of almost two years is making out with another dude. But I guess in a way she's doing me a favor.

Pulling my phone out of my pocket, I type a quick text to Bec.

Me: We're over.

And that's it. It's done.

If she doesn't have the respect to talk to me first before just hooking up with another guy, then I sure as fuck don't respect her enough to end it face to face.

Still, I'm sort of fuming as I head outside to my car.

Really, Bec? Ash Holloway??

He's *so* not her type *at all*. He plays guitar, wears ripped jeans and paints his nails black. *Dumbass emo nerd.* He reminds me of…

My fingers curl into a fist at my side. *Goddamnit.*

I drive the ten minutes home in silence, stewing in my awful mood. I know I'm being childish… I was going to break up with her, anyway. But still, if she could hook up with that clown in school, where *anyone* could see them, then I'm guessing this wasn't the first time they've done that, which means that bitch was cheating on me.

While I've been passing up advances from other girls this whole time—*from some of her best friends even*—she's just out here… kissing Brandon Bruce fucking Lee.

Bullshit.

Pulling into our driveway, I slam on the brakes and growl out loud. There's a Jeep in my spot. *Motherfucking stoner fuckhead.…*

I dive out of the car and storm into the house, fuming. The moment I'm through the door, I'm shouting, "Avi! You're in my fucking spot again!"

I don't see anyone, but I hear laughter coming from the back deck. So that's the direction I'm stomping next while my frustrations bubble over. At the sliding door, I pay no attention to what's happening out there. I just bark, "Avi. My fucking *spot*, you assface! You parked in it again. I thought I told you—"

"Ky." My dad cuts off my tirade with a scolding tone. "Watch your mouth. And stop yelling at your brother. It's his birthday."

My teeth crumble to bits as I mumble, "He's *not* my brother…"

Avi grins at me from where they're all sitting around the outside table. "Thanks for the birthday wishes, bro. You're the best."

Looking around, I take in the decorations, smell the food grilling… The giant birthday cake on the marble island in the kitchen.

Naturally, I forgot that today is my stepbrother's eighteenth birthday. Because I don't fucking care. But now that I'm being presented with the information again, I slightly recall my father telling me we were having a *family barbecue* to celebrate.

Awesome. Could this day get any worse??

"Kyran, come sit." Hannah pats the seat next to her. "There's salad and some snacks. The rest of the food will be ready soon."

She smiles kindly at me, and I exhale, allowing myself to relax just a tad. My stepmother is actually really nice, which makes holding on to all this hostility toward the new *family dynamic* just the tiniest bit difficult. I know it would make things easier if I just got over it and tried making a little more effort to get along with them… After all, it's been a while.

My dad married Hannah last September. It was a small ceremony in Narraganset. No church—*duh*. Just us and a couple of my father's friends. I guess the few members of the Vega family that Hannah and Avi still communicate with couldn't make it. But then again, my sister didn't show up either.

I'm glad it was small and casual. I really didn't have it in me to do the whole *wedding* thing. It was bad enough standing up there with Avi… Him next to his mom, and me next to my dad. He would wink at me, and I would

scowl in return. It's been like this since they moved in, and the wedding changed nothing.

Avi and I don't get along. We're too different, and he annoys the ever-loving shit out of me. All he does is smoke weed and draw crazy pictures. He eats everything in the house, parks in my spot, and when he isn't popping off sarcastic comments my way, he's rambling about all of these half-cocked conspiracy theories he apparently believes to be fact.

The dude is weird as fuck, but more than all of that, just looking at his stupid face reminds me of how much more pleasant my father is when he and his mother are around. The amount of furious resentment I harbor feels unhealthy, but I can't help it. My dad hasn't laughed or joked with me since I was ten years old. He only speaks to me about superficial shit; football, school, and the bare necessities of a strictly business father-son relationship.

It's been this way ever since… since the *last* time I tried to talk to him about something, and it tore our entire family apart. And I know he blames me for all of it. So *I* never get the Thomas Harbor that Hannah and Avi get.

He jokes around with Avi, gives him advice, offers to help him with things. All stuff he would never even consider doing for me, and for that reason more than all the other bullshit, I fucking *hate* Avi Vega.

My stepbrother… God, it still pisses me off, even eight months later.

I can't wait to leave. I'm chomping at the bit to get out of this house and go live on the BC campus. It's my escape from this fake family, and most importantly, from Avi and his knowing smiles. Something about him flashing those little grins all the time just makes me feel murderous. Another reason why it's a good thing I'm moving out soon.

I don't think I could make it to Christmas without smothering him to death.

Reluctantly, and not hiding it, I take a seat next to Hannah at the table while she fixes me a plate of salad. My dad smiles, but of course not at me. At his *wife*.

He lifts a bottle of beer to his lips and takes a sip.

Avi nudges his arm. "You think I could get one of those?" He aims a pleading smirk at my father. "You know… since I'm an adult now and everything."

"Avi." Hannah rolls her eyes, grinning.

My dad squints at Avi, but then he sighs and shrugs. "Sure, why not. Just one."

“Thanks, Tom.” Avi scoots out his chair, winking at me.

Why the fuck he always does that is beyond me, but it’s enraging. *That’s probably why does it.*

Avi goes over to the mini fridge, pulling out a bottle.

“Can I have one?” I ask, needing the alcohol to help subdue my irritation.

“You’re still seventeen,” my father says pointedly.

“Only for a few more months…” I grunt, feeling like such a child, it stiffens me with irritation. “And last I checked, the drinking age is *twenty-one*, not eighteen.”

I shoot a fake smile at Avi, and he returns it. But he takes out a second bottle, not waiting for my father to give his approval before he’s stepping over and handing it to me.

My dad doesn’t look pleased, but Hannah jumps in. “I’m sure they’ll be drinking beer in college, Tom. Better they learn to do it responsibly.”

I pause before opening the bottle, watching my father carefully. He concedes with a curt smile at his wife, and I’m fucking frothing with rage just beneath my surface.

If they only knew how he *really* is… He would never allow vices before they showed up. Once when he found Marcus’s cigarette butt outside on the walkway, he screamed at me for so long he nearly lost his voice.

But *Avi* is allowed to fishbowl his bedroom like he’s backstage at a Kid Cudi concert. *It’s fucking ridiculous.*

Twisting open the bottle aggressively, I take a long sip, ignoring the rest of them. Their conversing continues while we eat dinner. The burgers, hot dogs, and grilled chicken are accompanied by chitchatting about my dad’s business and how excited they are over his recent signing of some fancy new developer. The money is just rolling in right now, and I know this is all a preface to him insisting that I choose Business as my major at BC.

Football is all well and good for now, but I’m fully aware he expects me to follow in his footsteps and take over the family business, which I have no intention of doing.

So help me, I’ll make it to the NFL just so I don’t have to.

“So, Ky.” Hannah says my name, and when I glance at her, I can tell from her expression that she knows I don’t want to talk about the business stuff. I have to appreciate her trying to keep the peace between Dad and me. That is, until she asks, “How are things going with Becca?”

Avoiding answering, I take a large pull from my bottle of beer. *Oh, would you look at that? It's already empty…*

Picking at the label, I murmur, "We broke up."

"Oh… I'm sorry to hear that," she responds, sincerely.

"Kyran, that's a shame," my dad says, sounding much less *concerned* for me than he sounds *disappointed* in me. "She was a good girl. And you know, there's nothing wrong with starting college in a relationship. It might even give you some perspective—"

"She cheated on me," I cut him off, glaring across the table. His face falls as he gawks uncomfortably. My head tilts. "You still think I should have stuck it out?"

He says nothing, just gets up to grab himself another beer. *None for me… Thanks, Pops.*

"That's awful, Ky." Hannah covers my hand with hers on the table. It startles me, and I glimpse at her, shocked by the contact. "You deserve better."

A scoff comes from the other side of the table, and my face snaps in Avi's direction. He's sipping from his bottle, smirk intact.

"What's your problem?" I squint at him.

He finishes his slow swallow, eyes set on mine. "Nothing. I'm sure you didn't *deserve* to be cheated on."

"Avi!" Hannah scolds.

"I'm just saying…" he goes on with an indifferent shrug. "Karma's a bitch. Treat other people like shit and it eventually comes back to you."

"You sound like a moron," I grumble.

"Boys," my dad huffs, shaking his head. "Can't we have one family dinner where you two aren't at each other's throats the whole time?? It's getting really old."

Now it's my turn to scoff. I hate to admit it, but he has a point. Avi and I spend a majority of our every encounter bickering, which is why I make it a point to ignore him as much as humanly possible when you share a house, a school, and a bathroom with someone. Something about just being in his general vicinity turns up my internal frustrations a few hundred notches, and I don't need the stress.

I just want to get away from him for good. *August cannot come soon enough.*

“Good point. Let’s change the subject.” Avi leans back in his chair. “I was going to wait until after cake to share the good news, but I can’t hold it in anymore.”

He’s beaming, straight white teeth nearly blinding me. In fact, it’s making me wish I *was* blind, so I didn’t have to see that goddamn smile for one more second. It might be part of the reason I enjoy fucking with him at school… Turning that thing upside down gives me immense pleasure.

My dad and Hannah are eagerly awaiting Avi’s news, while I’m just sitting here, vigorously peeling chunks of label off my empty beer bottle.

“I’ve decided I won’t be going to Tufts,” Avi announces, and that gets me. My eyes spring up, and of course he’s staring right at me. “Because I got accepted to BC.”

What… the… fuck?!

I feel all the color drain from my face. My heart has completely stopped pumping and is just sitting in my chest like a dead hunk of meat.

No… No, no, no. No fucking way.

I don’t even notice how hard my fingers are digging into the table until they start to ache.

“Aviel! Oh my God, that’s amazing!” Hannah cheers, jumping up to hug her son.

“Congratulations, Avi!” My dad squeezes his shoulder. “Both of my boys going to Boston College!”

I’m gonna throw up.

“Go Eagles.” Avi grins at me while our parents freak out all around him. His dark eyebrow cocks. “Right, *bro*?”

Forcing myself into motion, I shove my chair back with a loud scrape. I feel physically sick and lightheaded as I stand up.

“Well… that’s just fucking perfect,” I croak, turning away from them and staggering inside the house, slamming the door behind me.

It’s a sliding door, so you really can’t slam it, which only serves to piss me off more. And I end up reopening and closing it four times just to slam it as hard as I can.

Completely unsatisfying. And now I look like even more of child having a temper tantrum.

“Fuck!” I growl out loud, ripping my hair at the roots.

This is such bullshit! I thought I was escaping him going to BC! Now he’s following me there, like some kind of unavoidable nuisance.

I’m shaking, I’m so angry. Stalking over to the birthday cake on the counter, I hock a massive, raging loogie and spit it right on top of the pretty chocolate frosting.

“Take that, asshole,” I teem.

Rushing through the house and up the stairs, I go to my bedroom and slam the door. *Much better.* I let out an even louder roar of frustration, grabbing the nearest item—a football trophy from middle school—and whipping it against the wall.

“Fuck you!” I seethe, pacing in circles. “Fuck you and your birthday. Fuck you and your BC acceptance letter… Fuck you and your smile! Fuck you fuck you *fuck* you!”

I’m fuming and can barely see through the red. *I fucking hate him!* I fucking *despise* him for stealing literally *everything* I have. Everything that was mine is now his, and it’s almost devastating.

Crawling onto my bed, I cover my head with my pillow and try my hardest to calm down. Sucking in breath after breath, I struggle to bite back the emotions.

Swallow them. Swallow swallow swallow.

Like fighting to eat something disgusting. Chew and fucking swallow it; push it all down; pack it into your gut.

“This isn’t a joke. You can’t just make things up like this, Kyran. I’m sure you’re overreacting.”

“Fuck you,” I breathe, choking on the emotions trying to scrape back up my throat like bile.

“I’m not making it up…”

“Yes, you are. Stop lying.”

“I’m not lying!”

“Fuck… you…” I whimper, with tears pushing behind my eyes.

Squeezing them shut tight, I scream into my bed, as loud as I can.

I’m twelve years old again… Screaming into the mattress. *Screaming* until my lungs hurt.

“You’ve destroyed everything…”

“Fuck!!” I scream. And cry.

And scream, and cry.

Until, exhausted and hoarse, I fall asleep, with my father’s disappointed tone lulling me in quiet torment.

I wake up to the sound of banging.

Lifting my head is difficult. It feels like it weighs a hundred pounds. My temples are throbbing, my face tight and my throat sore. Clearly, I fell asleep in a rage, which hasn't happened in a while. Even on Thanksgiving, when my dad proposed to Hannah, it wasn't this bad.

Slithering out of bed, I rub my eyes. It's dark outside, which means I must have passed out for at least a few hours. Reaching for my nightstand, I grab a bottle of Excedrin Migraine and pop two. Unfortunately, the pounding in my head is being matched by the sound pounding nearby. It only takes me a few seconds to realize it's coming from the bathroom door. Or rather, *Avi's* bathroom door.

"Kyran! I need to get into the goddamn bathroom!" Avi shouts from inside his bedroom. "Unlock the fucking door, you wank!"

I grin to myself. I must have locked his door this morning before I left for school.

Oops.

Reclining in bed, I close my eyes, waiting for the medicine to kick in and fix this headache. The sounds of him cursing at me through two doors widens my evil smirk. But then it stops, and is replaced by footsteps, followed by a new banging, on *my* bedroom door.

"Kyran, stop being a whiny bitch and let me into the fucking bathroom!" he hollers at me from out in the hall.

"Use the downstairs one," I grunt, just barely loud enough for him to hear me.

"No! All my stuff is in this one." His voice is extra petulant, and it has me rolling my eyes.

"Not my problem, princess," I huff, still smiling.

I don't even care if he's right about karma attacking me, because messing with him is all too satisfying. Especially now.

I'll take it, if it means getting him back for what he's taking of mine… My escape plan. It's so much more important than his special Dove For Men soap he loves to use.

“You’re really being an epic prick, you know that?” he rants through the door. “So I’m going to BC… Big fucking deal. It’s not the end of the world.”

That’s it. My spine stiffens, and I stand up fast, stalking over to the door. Unlocking it, I whip it open, meeting a startled look on his face, as if he didn’t expect me to actually open it.

“*Actually*, it is,” I growl. “It *is* the end of the world. BC was supposed to get me away from you. And now you’re following me there like some clingy ex-girlfriend.”

He makes a face like he’s amused at my audacity, and it brings the fury back, bounding through my limbs once more.

“You don’t own Boston College.” He folds his arms over his chest. “I can go to school wherever I want. This is America… Land of the free to go into crippling student loan debt anywhere you choose.”

“Exactly,” I hiss. “So go somewhere else. You don’t even care about school.”

“What’s wrong, brother?” He smirks, leaning against the doorframe. “You don’t wanna hang out with me for four more years?”

“I’d rather get kicked in the nuts for four years,” I mutter.

“Oh, well… that can be arranged.” He winks, and I’m about to explode.

Stepping up to his face, I smolder, “If you come to Boston College, I swear to God, I will make your life a living hell…”

But he doesn’t back down. In fact, he squares up to me and grins. “Game on, superstar. In case you haven’t noticed, you don’t intimidate me.”

“You’re gonna regret this,” I growl, inches from his face.

His brow arches. “You mean like your ex regrets not cheating on you sooner?”

Nope. I just *can’t* stuff it down anymore.

The wrath inside me bubbles over as I roar out loud and lunge at him.

Tackling him to the floor, I grab him by the throat. “I’ll wipe that fucking smirk off your face, you self-righteous prick!”

“Not before I wipe my ass with your face cloth, you epic toolbag!” he bellows while we wrestle each other on the floor of the hallway.

There are limbs everywhere. I’m choking him while he punches me in the sides, over and over. We’re rolling around, screaming and kicking. I’m pulling his hair, he’s biting me. It’s just a mess. The stupidest fight ever, and

not that I want to think about it, but we really seem like brothers now more than ever. Which, of course, pisses me off even more.

"How was your birthday cake, loser?!" I knee him in the gut, and he grunts.

He pauses for a minute, gaping up at me while we both heave for breath. "It was good… Why?" I grin wickedly, and he gasps. "Oh my God, did you jizz in it?!"

My face scrunches into one of bewildered disgust. "Ew, what the fuck is wrong with you??"

"You did something to it, didn't you?!" He twists my arm behind my back, and I whine.

"I spit on it!" I laugh breathlessly. "Hope you enjoyed eating my saliva, asshole!"

"Bitch!" he snarls, and we're back to tumbling on the floor, fighting like eight-year-olds.

The sound of heavy footsteps breaks into the rushing blood in my ears, and I look up from where I have Avi in a headlock to meet the irate gazes of my father and stepmother.

"What the hell is going on here?!" my dad barks while he and Hannah rush up the steps.

He immediately pulls me off of Avi, while Hannah does the same to her son.

"Avi, let go of him!" she shrieks, and Avi finally releases a fistful of my hair. "Break it up, you two!"

"This is fucking ludicrous!" my father roars as they get us both upright again. Avi and I are disheveled and breathing heavily, still glaring at one another. "I won't let this go on for one more second. All this fighting has to stop!"

Biting the inside of my cheek, I purse my lips, refusing to back down first. This is all his fault anyway… My *stepbrother*, who popped into my life for the sole purpose of ruining it.

"Whether you like it or not, you two are family now," my father says firmly. "And you will act like it."

"I want both of you to apologize and shake hands," Hannah demands. "Right now."

"He started it…" Avi mumbles, and Hannah slaps him on the chest.

“Aviel Vega, you’re an *adult*,” she hisses. “Act like it. Shake hands right now and apologize, or so help me, neither of you will see the outside of your bedrooms until you leave for college. Do you understand?”

Our stubborn glares remain locked for a couple more heavy seconds, before Avi rolls his eyes and mutters, “Sorry…”

“Me, too.” I force the words out. But my dad isn’t satisfied, and he shoves me forward. My jaw is tight as I grunt, “I’m… *sorry*,” and extend my hand.

Avi shakes it, limp and unenthused. Then we immediately turn and stomp into our respective bedrooms. And I hear my dad and Hannah mumbling about how obnoxious we are as they go back downstairs.

Ten seconds later, there’s one last bang from inside Avi’s room.

“The *door*, Kyran,” he growls.

Rolling my eyes, I stalk inside the bathroom and unlock his door. He flings it open, face still flushed with aggravation.

“I’m serious,” I mutter one last threat. “Stay the fuck away from me at BC, or next time, I’ll break your fucking nose.”

Spinning, I leave the bathroom, ignoring his words on my way out.

“You got it, superstar.”

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CHAPTER FIVE

CaptainJackSwallow: Ride my gag reflex like a pony

One Year Later…
(Freshman Year, Boston College)

"Oh, shit. Hide me."

I crouch down on the bench I'm sitting on, using Frankie's body as a shield.

"You're an idiot, Vega," she huffs, while Zeb and Micah laugh.

"Correction… He's playing it smart," Zeb sighs. "Olivia is as clingy as they come. Just ask this asshole." He juts his thumb in Micah's direction. "She followed him here from New Hampshire."

"Okay, that's not true." Micah shakes his head. "We just both happened to come to BC. It's a big school…"

"Don't act like you didn't come here just to escape her." Zeb laughs.

"I can't believe you hooked up with her." Micah scolds me with his eyes as I finally straighten back up, now that Olivia Wheeler is out of sight.

"I was drunk," I grumble, reaching for my last Twizzler and ripping off a bite between my teeth. "It was the freshman orientation party. All we did was make out, and she's been following me around ever since."

"That's what you get for hooking up at the freshman orientation party," Frankie says pointedly. "It's like a rule. Never hook up with someone your first week of college."

"Well, clearly, I fucked up," I mutter while petulantly chewing my candy, and they continue to laugh at my expense. *Some friends…* "Don't be

jealous that I'm out here slingin' dick," I tease, and they fake clap.

"Sling that dick my way, Vega." Zeb winks at me. "I'll teach you a thing or two."

I roll my eyes while Micah doubles over.

"Okay, if you two are done flirting," Frankie sighs, standing up. "We're gonna be late for band practice." She grabs Zeb by the arm.

"I'll walk with you." I pick up the trash from our lunch. "I'm going that way."

The three of us look to Micah. "I'd love to join, but I heard Kreston is posting midterm grades today. I need to find out if my parents are going to allow me to come home for the summer, or if I'll be living in my car until the fall semester starts."

We all laugh sympathetically, and I pat him on the back. "Good luck!"

Micah walks off in the direction of the science building, while the rest of us head toward Lyons Hall.

Freshman year at Boston College was awesome. The best part was that Frankie got in too, so I came here knowing I'd have at least one friend to keep me from drowning in insecurity. Especially since this place is so far outside of any college I ever thought I'd attend. *I mean, it's a Jesuit school, for Christ's sake.*

I don't want to sound accusatory, but do they even allow Jews to go here?

Well, apparently, they do, because here I am. I guess it helps that my last name is Vega, not Roth—my mother's maiden name.

To be fair, I really don't think it matters much. Especially for me, since religion is literally the last thing I give a flying fuck about. All I knew going into this was that the art program was pretty sweet, and there were opportunities to major in things I could potentially make a career out of, although I don't know that I necessarily care much about those things either.

Here's how it went down. I applied to BC as a joke, because my stepbrother, the most annoying, preppy jock on the face of the earth, wouldn't stop raving about it, and I kind of wanted to see if I could get in, just to throw it in his annoying, preppy jock face. When I *did*, I really had no intention of actually going here. But then Frankie told me she was going here, and I was like… *Okay. Let's see what this Jesus-loving college on a hill is all about.*

So far, it's been fun. I'm still not great at school, so my grades are average at best. But I've been making friends, having a blast with my art classes, and you know… *slingin' dick.*

That's a joke, of course. But based on real events, because I've sort of come out of my shell in college—*get it? Come*.

Not that I'm some slut who hooks up with everyone, but I guess it's safe to say I'm a bit of a late bloomer with dating and sex and whatnot. The stuff most people I know were doing in high school, I just started doing this year. I go to parties with my friends, and sometimes I make out with girls. Often, we'll explore the bases after first, and on occasion, we'll take it all the way home. It's very casual, which is fine. Safe, consensual… the whole nine.

I'm just figuring myself out. And as I've heard my whole life, from adults, movies, TV shows, etc., college is the place to do that. So that's what I'm doing.

I'm nineteen years old. The way I see it, I have the rest of my life to be serious and figure out what I want to do as a career. For right now, I want to have fun and learn about me.

You have no clue who you really are.

The voice stops me in my tracks, stiffening muscles all over my body.

I can't fucking *believe* he's still in my head. It's been like two years since he said that to me… And I loathe the fact that the words are still ringing as loudly as they were when he said them.

Speaking of Kyran, I barely ever see him. Yes, we go to the same school, but we're in completely different programs and we live on opposite sides of campus—*Thank God*.

I do see him on occasion, but we don't speak, or even look at each other, for that matter. In fact, we've only interacted once since my eighteenth birthday—when we got in that ridiculous fight over me coming here. It makes me laugh now, because we've been at the same school for nearly two full semesters and we never have to deal with one another. So clearly, he overreacted a wee bit in assuming me coming to BC would mean we'd be on top of each other twenty-four-seven.

Such a drama queen.

I'll admit, it kind of sucks. Knowing my first ever opportunity to have a sibling was wasted on someone like Kyran Harbor. I mean, imagine if he was cool? We could be hanging out, having shared experiences, instead of praying we don't happen to wind up at any of the same parties.

It’s only happened once so far. It was the night before Thanksgiving and the rumor was that a rager was being thrown in one of the dorms off Comm Ave, which is where Kyran lives. I knew it was a likely possibility he’d be there, especially if the party was in his dorm, or one of the neighboring ones. In all honesty, I did consider skipping it just out of sheer self-preservation and not wanting to deal with him talking shit about me all night or starting some kind of fight.

But then Frankie and our friend, Bea, convinced me to suck it up and go. So I did. And as predicted, it didn’t go over well.

We noticed each other at the same time, but pretended the other didn’t exist for a couple of solid hours, during which time I smoked and drank enough that I actually *did* forget about his existence for a while. But when Bea started making out with his friend, Theo, it drew our two groups a little too close together for comfort.

In an effort to avoid an argument and get away from Kyran’s incessant scowling, I went to the other side of the party. I was talking to Micah, who I’d just met that night—we bonded immediately over a shared love of the same true crime podcast—when someone tapped on my shoulder.

And, wouldn’t you know… it was stepbrother dearest. There to fill my evening with rays of sunshine.

I guess I’d rolled my eyes before he even said anything, because his first words to me were, “What the hell is your problem?”

“You,” I sighed, not giving a single fuck, mainly because I was drunk and high, but also because I was really sick of his fucking attitude. “*You’re* my problem. In fact, you’ve been my *only* problem since I moved to this city.”

Kyran’s eyes narrowed, and he began to crowd me a little. “Well, maybe if you would just stay away from me, we wouldn’t be having so many issues.”

Closing my eyes, I sucked in a deep breath, channeling every ounce of chill and Zen and whatever other namaste shit I had left. When I reopened them, he was still standing there glaring at me, which proves once and for all that prayers don’t do shit.

“You came over to *me*, Kyran,” I grumbled. “I was perfectly content forgetting who you are, just like I’ve been doing for months now.”

Micah started tugging on my sleeve. “Um… Avi? How do you know the Eagles quarterback? And why are you arguing with him…?”

We both ignored Micah as Kyran's jaw started doing that visible tick thing I've seen way more times than I'd like to. "I came over here to tell you to fuck off."

An incredulous laugh bubbled from my throat. "That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard! You came over here to start shit because you're *bored*. What's wrong, superstar?? Got no one to pick on now that we aren't living together anymore?"

His lips parted like he was going to argue, but in my drunken surge of foolish confidence, I squared up to him and kept running my mouth.

"News flash, Ky… I don't want to be near you any more than you want me near you. So if you could hop down from your egotistical high horse and take that *giant* studded stick out of your ass for long enough to enjoy a party, I'm sure you'd be doing everyone who knows you a huge favor."

I knew right away that I'd fucked up when I saw how red his face was getting. I could actually feel the flames of searing hatred he was shooting at me through his eyes, like those laser beams Atreyu has to avoid in *The Never Ending Story*.

The Southern Oracle. Deep cut.

I'd never seen him so irate. I'm talking big, bulging vein in his forehead, muscles in his neck straining like a prize-winning stead… the works.

But it wasn't until Micah whispered, "Holy fuck, you about to die," and stepped away from me—out of possible beat-down range—that I noticed everyone else in the party was staring at us, too. Which was a very bad thing for me… Because it meant an artsy emo nerd had just stood up to the quarterback of the football team, something that doesn't happen without retribution.

"Get the fuck outside now," Kyran snarled. "I'm gonna beat the living shit out of you, Avi. Seriously, it's been a long time coming. Get. The. *Fuck*. Outside." His tone was so frighteningly calm, I couldn't help how hard I was shaking in my Chucks.

But I stood my ground. I forced myself to stand still and hold his wrathful gaze.

"No," I muttered, hoping like hell he hadn't caught the tremor in my voice. "If you want to kick my ass, you're gonna have to do it right here." My eyes shifted left, then right before I whispered, "In front of all these witnesses."

Kyran stepped in even closer to me, his warm breath hitting my face. I could practically *taste* it… Like mint and some kind of booze. It gave me chills, pumping my heart and rattling my bones.

"You must be… the *stupidest* stoner prick on the face of the earth," he growled in my face. And I *felt* how tense he was, even though we weren't touching. It was like the heat of rage in his muscles was transferring onto my body.

I thought I saw his arm move, and I couldn't help flinching. I've never been a fighter. Sure, I've got balls and I like to talk shit, but that's the beginning and end of it. I'm positive Kyran Harbor could easily waste me if he wanted to.

But I think the flinch saved me. Because his lips quirked in a very subtle smirk, as if he was pleased by how afraid of him I was. Then he fell back, just a couple of inches, and slapped his heavy hand down on my shoulder. Naturally, I flinched again, and his grin widened.

"Fine. You can have one more drink," he rumbled. "But then you should leave, if you know what's good for you." He cocked his head. "After all, I'll be seeing you at home tomorrow… *bro*."

He turned and casually strutted away from me, rejoining his friends, the other spawns of Satan, in the fiery pits of Hell known as this party.

I let out the longest breath ever while all the onlookers resumed their partying, of course giggling and talking shit about me… The loser who just got his ass chewed out by the Eagles QB.

"Jesus, Mary, and Joseph…" Micah murmured, having returned to my side. "That was downright terrifying. Why does that dude hate you so much?"

Irate glare fixed in Kyran's direction, I watched him laugh and fuck around with his jock pals like nothing had happened. And I muttered, "He's my stepbrother."

So there you have it. That was my last actual *encounter* with Kyran, save for us continuing to avoid each other at home. We haven't spoken a word since, and for the most part, it hasn't been an issue… But that's only because I haven't shown up at another party he's been at, and he can't outright attack me at home, being clearly afraid of his father and all. It's a lucky thing too, because I've been attending my fair share of parties, just not on his side of campus.

Ugh. I hate thinking about it as *his side*. It's so fucking stupid. I haven't done shit to the kid, but apparently, my mere existence is enough to piss him off.

Outside of Lyons, the three of us stop before heading inside.

"Come on, hurry up," Frankie snaps her fingers at Zeb.

He takes a long drag from his vape, blowing a giant cloud of cotton candy-scented smoke in her face. "Take a chill pill, mama. We have a few minutes."

She gives him a look, but then concedes and pulls out her own vape. "Alright, fine."

I just chuckle, tugging my phone out of my pocket and standing next to the two of them while they fill the area with puffs of vapor.

"Where are you off to?" Zeb asks me in between drags.

"I have photography class," I tell them while scrolling Instagram. "Then I'm gonna go smoke until I forget that I just barely passed my biology midterm."

Zeb laughs. "Tell me about it. Thank God freshman year is over. All of the most heinous core classes are pretty much done."

"Speak for yourself," Frankie huffs. "The social work curriculum is insane. I'm already regretting this major."

Their voices are fading out with my eyes set on my phone screen.

A picture of Kyran just popped up on my feed. It was posted by this girl Lexi Erikson. She's a cheerleader, and your typical blonde bombshell, so of course she's Kyran's type. The picture looks like it was taken at a party. Kyran has his arm slung around Lexi's shoulder and she's nestling herself into his chest, making a kissy face up at him.

And the caption reads:

> ***Love spending time with the sexiest QB in Eagles history! Can't wait for training camp this summer! #BCEagles #Eaglesfootball #BCcheer #GoEagles #number9***

I scoff and roll my eyes. It makes perfect sense that Kyran would get here and immediately cozy up to another cheerleader, just like he did in high school. It's totally his MO. Not to mention, the dude is an all-star football player *already*.

Superstar Stepbrother. Why am I not surprised?

"Hey, check this out!" Frankie's voice tugs my attention away from the picture that's rumbling my gut, and I glance up. She's pointing at a flyer

pinned on one of the Job Listings boards. “They’re looking for someone to be the football team’s mascot!”

She rips the sheet off, and Zeb peers over her shoulder to read. “Oh my God!” He cackles. “Baldwin the Eagle. That’s hilarious.” His face snaps in my direction. “You should totally do it!”

I stare at him for a solid three seconds in baffled silence before a burst of laughter flies from my lips. “Yea… Good one.”

“No, seriously!” Zeb slaps his hands together. “It would be so cute! Avi the Eagle.”

I shake my head. “You’re certifiable.”

“He has a point!” Frankie says animatedly. And now I’m growing even more horrified. “Then you could come to games with us!”

“Okay, I’m starting to think you’re not joking… and it’s worrying me.” I give them my most bewildered look.

“I’m not joking.” Zeb grins deviously.

“Neither am I,” Frankie adds, stepping over and shoving the paper in my face. “I’m sure it would be so much fun. And you’d practically be part of the team.”

“I don’t *want* to be part of the team,” I grumble, eyeing her like she’s lost her marbles.

She cocks her head. “Why… Because of Kyran?”

“No,” I scoff, then chew on my lower lip for a moment. “Not *only* because of him. I just don’t want to waste my Friday nights prancing around dressed like an eagle. I didn’t think I’d need to explain that to you, but apparently, you guys don’t know me as well as I thought you did.”

They both laugh. “Come on, Avi!” Zeb sighs. “You should consider doing something other than fucking off in class and smoking weed.”

“Hey, that’s not fair!” I frown. “I *also* like to get drunk.” He shakes his head. “And I draw. That’s what I do in my free time, and I like it that way.” Frankie and Zeb share a look, to which I roll my eyes. “And I just don’t think I should willfully invite another reason for Kyran to start shit with me. He hates me enough as it is…”

Frankie rubs my arm. “Don’t let your evil stepbrother stand in the way of your happiness, Av.”

Another laugh trickles. “You think wearing an eagle costume at football games is *happiness*??”

“I’m just saying…” She giggles. “It would be something new and fun for you to do.”

Looking over the flyer, I grin at the picture of Baldwin the Eagle. It’s fully ridiculous. But I can’t deny that its goofiness is sort of endearing.

“And… just think of how much more you could mess with Kyran…” Frankie sings in my ear.

“Yea!” Zeb cheers, still wearing his wicked smirk. “Superstar quarterback boy needs to be taken down a peg.”

My eyes flit up to his, and my lips curl.

He has a point.

It’s our last night in the dorms before summer break.

Freshman year at BC is officially in the books, and I’m excited to report that I survived. Dare I say, I even *enjoyed* myself.

We’re all hanging out in Frankie’s dorm room, smoking some kush, sipping some Rosé, and helping her pack up the last of her stuff. When I first got here, I thought I’d be anxious as hell to get home for summer break, to see Mom and get away from all the schooling and whatnot. But now that the time has come, I’m actually kind of bummed. I’m gonna miss living here, with all my awesome new friends. Being able to see them whenever I want, shooting the shit in between classes, having lunch together every day.

I never thought I’d say this, but I can’t wait for fall so I can get back here.

“Ohhh, snap!” Zeb shouts, jumping up onto the table. “Roomie alert!”

He’s holding his phone up and pointing to Micah.

Mic’s face lights up. “No way! Really? We got it??”

“Yea, baby!” Zeb is shimmying around while Micah stands up and starts doing the robot. “We’re in Welch. Third floor.”

“Ooh, that’s a good floor,” Bea chimes in while stuffing a bunch of books into a box. “I made out with two redheads on that floor. A girl *and* a guy.”

“At the same time?” I ask through a grin, and she winks at me.

Bea is a super chill girl. She's Frankie's roommate, and totally gorgeous. Fair skin, dark hair that's long and curly and always smells incredible. We made out once when we first met. We were drunk, and it was fun, but we both agreed not to do it again because we didn't want to make things weird. At this point, I'm trying to keep my dick away from people inside my friend group.

"Avi! Will you help me, please?" Frankie shouts from inside her bedroom.

Getting up, I'm laughing at Zeb and Micah, who are still dancing in celebration of the news that they get to room together next semester, while I walk around the corner into Frankie's room.

"Aw, man! You already packed up the Mothman picture I drew for you," I whine and pout at the empty space on her wall.

Frankie laughs. "Duh. It's one of my most prized possessions. Here, grab this and wrap it in some bubble wrap for me, please." She hands me a ring light.

"Why do you have so much filming equipment?" I ask, trying to be as careful as possible wrapping her expensive stuff.

Frankie gives me a look, full lips painted with bright purple lipstick sloping into a smirk. "I can't tell you my secrets, Vega. You might think differently of me."

I cackle out loud. "Right. Clearly you don't know who you're talking to…"

She stops what she's doing and picks up her phone. Messing around on the screen, she taps and taps as she struts over to me. Then she hands it to me.

My brows knit together as I take it, eyes sliding over the screen. It's an OnlyFans account. And the profile picture shows a girl that's obviously her wearing a mask, with the username, **FrankieSaysRelax**.

"Oh my God, is this you?!" My mouth hangs open while I scroll through the account.

It's not a subscriber's account… She's a *creator*.

My eyes bug out of my skull. "Holy smokes, you're naked!"

She belts a laugh, snatching the phone from me. "Alright, Pervy McCreeperson. Calm down."

I clear my throat. "Yea, I think I need to check out more of that stellar content." I reach for her phone again, but she pulls it away, chuckling.

“You gotta pay to play,” she hums and wiggles her eyebrows. “Just for shorty bang bang to look your way.”

“Backstreet.” I grin. “Nice.

“Thanks.”

“Okay… *what?!*” I gasp, then lower my voice, quickly peeking at the doorway to make sure no one’s listening. “You have an OnlyFans??”

Frankie nods. “Hell yea. The money is on point.”

My eyebrow jumps. “Really?”

“Ohhh yeaaa,” she sighs. “I just started it this year, and I already almost have enough to get my own place off campus!”

“What?!” I shout again, and her eyes widen.

“Shhh! Be cool, baby. Damn.” She looks to the doorway. “No one knows. Except Bea.”

My mind is reeling. I can’t believe what she’s telling me. *My* friend, *darling little Frances Dumonte, has been showing her naked body online for money?!*

I’m actually not all that surprised. If anyone I know was going to do it, it’d be her. She’s sort of a wild child.

“Wow…” My eyes slide up and down her. I can’t help looking at her differently now, saucy little minx that she is. “That’s awesome. So… do you only do solo videos, or do you ever invite… guests?”

Her smile goes wide. “Are you asking to make a cameo, Vega?”

I can’t help how much heat is rushing to my face. My eyes fall to my feet. “Me?? No way. I don’t think I could pull that off…”

“You’d be surprised,” she croons, then taps me on the butt. “Okay, playtime is over. Back to work.”

Shaking off all this new information, I go back to helping her pack up the rest of her stuff. But the whole time, my mind is stuck on Frankie’s side hustle, wondering what she does, and how much she makes.

It’s pretty interesting. Subscription services for content creators is a rapidly growing business, and porn… Well, porn will always be a massive enterprise. I’ve personally never subscribed to any OnlyFans accounts, but I’ve certainly seen people promoting them… on the dark side of Twitter. And in clips on PornHub.

My thoughts are swirling as we finish up the packing, then order pizza. And just as Zeb is lighting up our farewell joint, my phone chimes in my pocket.

Pulling it out, I tap the screen to find an email from BC Housing.

"Oh shit… It's here," I whisper, opening the email while saying a silent prayer that I'll be near my friends.

"Fingers crossed for Welch!" Micah chirps.

"Or Roncalli!" Bea adds.

"Yea, and hopefully you get to room with someone a little more fun than Finn." Zeb smirks.

"Hey, at least my roommate is quiet, and clean. Unlike yours." I peek at him, and he rolls his eyes.

Zeb couldn't get away from his current roommate, Evan, fast enough. He's a preppy jock, just like Kyran. Only he's also a slob and a half who blasts country music every morning at six a.m.

"If I hear *'Save a Horse, Ride A Cowboy'* one more time, I'll stand behind said horse and let it kick me in the face," Zeb mutters, and we all laugh. "But still… only slightly worse than your roomie, who I honest to God think might be a serial killer."

"Oh, fuck…" I whisper, tuning him out while my eyes frantically scan the email.

"What?!" Bea whines. "Don't leave us hanging!"

"Are they sending you down to Tudor?" Micah scoots in closer on the floor.

"Worse…" I mutter, my stomach flopping like a fish out of water. "I'm in Walsh."

Everyone gasps.

"Walsh, as in… across campus?" Frankie looks upset.

My head drops, and I rub my temples.

Walsh, as in… *Kyran's* side of campus.

Worse than that. The Walsh Residence Hall is where Kyran lived this year.

Oh my God, if we end up in the same dorms, he'll literally make my life a living hell.

"Maybe he'll be moved too," Bea says nervously, already aware of my plight and clearly trying to be positive.

But we all know, Kyran moving out of Walsh is unlikely. Most of the football players live there. And if I know Kyran like I think I do, he'll want to stay with his pack.

"Fuck me, this is awful…" I grumble.

“Ask for a transfer,” Zeb says. “Who knows? They might let you…”

“Fat chance,” I grunt, tossing my phone onto the floor. “They don’t cater to sophomores. Especially ones who aren’t on the football team, have shitty grades, and whose parents’ names aren’t on buildings and shit.”

“It won’t be so bad.” Micah nudges me. “Bright side, the Walsh dorms are supposed to be the nicest.”

“Yea, because they’re full of football all-stars and rich kids,” I sigh. “I don’t fucking belong there.”

“Well, then…” Frankie grins sympathetically, picking up a crumpled piece of paper and tossing it at me. “Looks like no better time than the present to become part of the team.”

Narrowing my gaze at her, I snatch the piece of paper, unrumpling it. And I let out a derisive scoff.

Baldwin the fucking Eagle…?

Kill me now.

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CHAPTER SIX

CarpetburnCarl: The only time I'd kick you out of the bed would be so I could do you on the floor.

Kyran

4 Months later…
(Sophomore Year, Boston College)

A lot of great athletes have their own superstitions or rituals leading up to big games.

I know guys who refuse to eat anything for twenty-four hours before game day. No matter how much Coach gets on them about fueling up, they just won't eat. They say the hunger sharpens their focus, as if their bodies' need for sustenance directly correlates with their hunger to win.

I know guys who abstain from sex the day before a big game… I mean, they won't even jerk off. And I also know guys who insist on blowing their load, like *minutes* before we hit the field.

I don't practice any of that stuff, but I definitely get it. Keeping yourself sharp is mental *and* physical. But the emotional aspect… that's where my superstitions lie.

Times of high stress have a tendency to trigger me. It's something no one in the world but me knows about, which is a very good thing. I feel like keeping it hidden is the main reason I'm able to focus so well. The control I have over my emotions teeters… It's unavoidable. But pretending everything is fine is where I excel, especially when it comes time to lace up and run out onto field in front of hundreds, even thousands of cheering fans.

I’m used to having all eyes on me. The Somerville High football team did really well, and our senior year, we brought home a championship. That’s what got me my scholarship to BC, and cemented me as the freshman quarterback. They put me in on game three of the season last year, and we ended up crushing one of our biggest rivals, forty-one to seventeen. After that, the eyes on me began to multiply, and now I’ve heard the BC stadium tonight will be packed.

A full house, first game of the season.

Boston College football is a huge deal. The Eagles have been an NCAA division name for as long as I can remember, and they’ve made it to the ACC finals the last four years in a row. But no National Championship in those runs… Not *yet*.

This need inside me to overcome my emotional hang-ups is what drives me. It’s a ravenous hunger to rip apart my issues with bared teeth and show them that they don’t control my life. *I* control my life. Which is why when everyone else is listening to Coach Matthews give his first pep talk of the season to rile us up and motivate us to kick some Cardinal ass tonight, I’m zoned in on my hands.

Call it my own superstition… Call it a nervous tick or a habit, call it whatever you want. But I have this thing where I’ll stare at the lines on my palms and imagine them as roads I know. Sometimes I’ll even envision little cars driving up and down them, cruising the highways and streets I’ve been driving and walking on my whole life.

I’m not sure that I really remember where this coping mechanism came from, or what started it. And if I do, I’m sure I don’t want to think about that right now. *Right now*, all I’m concerned with is the backed-up traffic on the Mass Pike of my hand.

It’s being caused by literally nothing. *People can’t drive for shit on the Pike.*

“Harbor,” Coach shouts my name, and my eyes fling up to his. “You good?”

“Better than,” I grunt, pulling on my gloves, covering up the lines of my own personal road map.

“That’s what I like to hear,” Coach says. “I want your heads in the game tonight, boys. We’re gonna hit ’em so hard it’ll make their tails spin. Now let’s get out there!”

The room erupts in cheers, and we all jump up, gathering ourselves to head out onto the field.

“Eagles bitin’ the heads off Cardinals tonight, playa.” Guty shoulders me, and I grin at him.

Samson Gutierrez is our wide receiver, and also my roommate. He’s one of the best dudes I know; an awesome football player, with an infectious laugh and one of those personalities you can see like a glimmering aura. We hit it off immediately last year, and our on-field chemistry is something Coach is banking on to bring us to the finals again this year.

Only *this time*, I’m not leaving without that championship trophy.

The team files out, through the halls within the stadium that lead us to the field. My nerves are rattling with adrenaline, but that’s to be expected. It’s a big deal, after all. First game of the season after I made a name for myself freshman year. Coach already had the talk with me… about scouts and where I see myself going. To me, it felt a little premature, but I guess it’s not, all things considered.

Guys who live and breathe football are thinking about this stuff since they’re old enough to hold a ball, and I totally get it. I’ve known since I was a kid that I wanted to play for the NFL someday.

This is you…

Chomping the emotions back one last time, I step through the entryway, taking in the Friday night lights and the loud, bellowing cheers of fifty thousand people.

Fifty thousand… Holy shit. That’s a big number.

My eyes scan the stands, a sea of maroon and gold on our side. I would have no idea where my father is sitting, but I’m sure he’s here. He comes to most of my games… The only thing he does for me. Still, I’m not sure it’s really for *me*…

The music is blaring from the speakers, but I can barely hear it over the noise from the stands. Our cheerleaders are out there, doing their thing; shaking butts and pompoms in tandem. I spot Lexi right in the middle and she blows me a kiss.

“If we win, you’re gonna get so laid,” Guty laughs.

“Got that sock on the doorknob already.” I wink at him, and he cackles, grabbing me by the shoulders and shaking me around.

Helmets go on and Coach gathers us for our pregame chant.

“Eagles on three,” he shouts fast. “One, two, three—”

“Eagles!” we all roar, hands breaking up out of the circle.

Coach pats me on the back while we all run out onto the field, the crowd bellowing for us. The entire stadium is bumping like a dubstep festival. There are signs and people with painted faces. It’s a madhouse.

But I can’t focus on any of that. Because it’s *game time*.

We win the coin toss, and punt first. Guty retrieves the ball, and we’re starting at our twenty-five-yard line.

Here we go.

The first drive gets us in field-goal range. Our kicker, my friend, Theo Reeves, sends the ball sailing right down the middle of the goal post. And less than four minutes into the game, we’re already ahead.

On the bench, I whip off my helmet to grab some water, my eyes fixed on our defense taking the field. Coach is quiet, which makes sense. He doesn’t tend to get loud until the second half.

“Oh my God!” Guty lets out one of his booming laughs. “I love that guy.”

“Who?” I have no idea what he’s talking about, because I’m too busy watching Jenkins, our cornerback, who looks like he’s about to move before the snap. He doesn’t—*thankfully*—but still, my eyes are narrowed in on him.

“Baldwin,” Guty keeps cackling. “I wonder why he’s named that… It’s like Alec Baldwin. *30 Rock*… Amirite?!”

“What the fuck are you rambling about??” I whip my face right, where Guty is sitting next to me, watching the team mascot and laughing like it’s the funniest thing he’s ever seen.

I can’t help but squint at the dude in the eagle costume. He’s pretending to lean up against the giant tub of Gatorade, but then he elbows it by accident and the whole thing almost comes toppling over.

“He knows he’s not a *mime*, right?” I tilt my head in amusement as the character frolics around on the sidelines.

“I don’t even care, man.” Guty sighs out his chuckles. “That dude is on point. I’m gonna hire him for my nephew’s birthday party.”

Suddenly, the crowd erupts, and I spring out of my seat.

“Interception!” the ref calls, and we all begin shouting.

“Fuck yea, baby!” Guty high-fives me, stuffing his helmet back on.

“Let’s do this, Brutus.”

I cast one last lingering glance at Baldwin the Eagle, shaking my head as I cover it with my helmet and jog back onto the field.

Half-time. And we're up by one.

The score is twenty-four to seventeen. Not a cushy lead at all, but I'll take it for now. As long as our defense follows Coach's instructions and tightens it up.

We come back out for the tail-end of the cheerleaders, and all the guys are swooning. We have some stupidly hot girls cheering for us, one of whom I've gotten to know sort of well…

Lexi and I are a thing, I guess. She's trying to lock it down, and I'm not really interested in getting serious, so at times it's a bit awkward. Honestly, I think she likes the attention she gets from being seen dating me more than she actually wants to be in a *relationship* with me, which isn't a big shocker.

We hooked up a few times last year, then she kept showing up at training camp over the summer, so I kind of fell into it out of boredom and convenience, a deadly combination. Part of me hopes that if I just ignore her incessant texts about us being *exclusive*, she'll get the hint and back off. But then I'm also aware it never really works out that way.

My head is in the game, mentally running plays and visualizing how the other team is going to move, when the dancing eagle catches my eye once more. He's strutting around in front of the cheerleaders, and I have to laugh. I don't know the guy who was Baldwin last year… *I think his name was Brian or Bobby or something.* I have to assume it's the same dude in there, though his moves are certainly more extravagant than last season.

The crowd cheers as the girls and Baldwin finish up their dance, and Coach huddles us together.

"Lock up the formation," he yells over the noise. "They move, you move. Harbor and Guty, I want you two together as much as possible. Everyone else, pave the way."

We shout and break, and as my head lifts, I see through the wall of my teammates that Baldwin the Eagle has removed his head.

He's standing off the sidelines, getting a drink of water. And the sight of shaggy, jaw-length black hair and unmistakable dimples has my eyes widening and my stomach clenching up like a fist.

Avi… Is that… fucking Avi*??*

"Harbor!" Coach roars at me, and I snap back into focus, rushing after the guys.

Get it together. There's no time for any of that.

But even as I'm preparing for the snap, I can't help how my eyes are sliding off the field again… To my goddamn *stepbrother* wearing an eagle costume.

What in the holy fuck is he doing here?!

I'm distracted. I don't want to be, but I just am, and I end up hesitating and getting my ass sacked.

"Harbor!" Coach hollers at me again from the sidelines.

"I know…" I huff, shaking off the ache of being tackled, nodding at him.

I've got this. Who gives a fuck that Avi is the mascot right now? It's weird, yes, but I can't think about it. I have a game to win.

I pull my head out of my ass, and on the next drive, I send the ball sailing all the way to Guty for a thirty-yard first down. The crowd goes wild.

I'm struggling not to, but I glance over to the sidelines once more, where Baldwin… aka *Avi*… is doing the Moonwalk.

Jesus fucking Christ, take the wheel. Please.

I think the stupefied irritation of seeing Avi at a football game—the place that's supposed to be *mine*, not his—is actually helping me right now. I'm raging so intensely, my entire body is keyed up, which, in turn, seems to be sharpening my focus. By the time there are only sixty seconds left on the clock, the score is thirty-four to twenty-seven, with the Cardinals trailing us by only one touchdown.

On our final drive, I get us up to their thirty-yard line. That's when I spot my in; the perfect opening to solidify our win.

Launching my arm up, I shoot the ball into the air, in the direction of where Guty has managed to break away, and is sprinting his legs off into the end zone.

Time is standing still. The crowd is silent. Everyone's eyes are on the ball as it spirals…

Right into Guty's arms.

Boom. Win.

The Eagles take our first game of the season.

Everyone freaks out after that. The stands are thumping, my teammates are attacking me with roars and cheers and slaps all over my body. And I'm celebrating… But also itching to get off the field and confront our mascot.

When I finally slip free, my feet bring me stomping in his direction. People are shouting congratulatory comments at me from all sides, but my narrowed gaze is stuck on the dancing eagle.

I reach him fast and give him a hard shove from behind. "What the fuck are you doing??" I shout over the ruckus.

He spins to face me, still wearing the eagle head, so I can't see his face.

"Umm… celebrating!" He starts *raising the roof*. "Good game, bro. You really—"

I rip his head off to reveal my stepbrother, hair sort of slicked at his temples with sweat, and giving me a very wide-eyed stare. But also, still grinning awkwardly, because this is Avi we're talking about.

"Thanks…" he sighs, blowing a strand of hair away from his eyes. "It's hot as balls in here."

"Avi… What the fuck are you *doing* dressed as Baldwin the goddamn Eagle??" I growl at him again, losing my patience for his constant fucking around.

I should be *celebrating* right now, but instead, I'm dealing with his goofy ass.

Avi's dark eyebrow cocks, and his head slants right. "I'm the mascot. *Duh*." He chuckles. "What do you think… I snuck in here and stole the costume to be funny?? Although…" He rubs his chin. "That *would* be pretty funny. I hope no one does it to me…"

"Avi!" I crowd him, and he backs up. "*Why* are you the mascot? Is this some kind of sick joke?? Why are you fucking with me like this?!"

He blinks over eyes that are sort of shiny. The stadium lights bring out the blue in their gray, a note I shake my head at because I don't give a fuck what color his eyes are… *He's ruining my life!*

"Kyran, I'm not fucking with you," he grumbles and rolls the foggy blue. "I saw the flyer, filled out an application to be the mascot, and they

gave me the job. What's the big deal? I thought it might be fun…"

"Fun to intrude on the *one* thing you haven't taken from me yet?!" I roar in his face, backing him up until he hits the Gatorade thing again.

"*What??* No…" His brows furrow. "What are you talking—"

Suddenly, arms wrap around my waist from behind, a feminine whine cutting into our heated conversation.

"Babe! You crushed it!" Lexi squeals, hugging onto me while I shift to find her fluttering lashes up at my face.

She has maroon and gold sparkles all over her face in the form of elaborate cheerleader makeup. It's sort of excessive, but I guess I appreciate the team spirit.

"Hey, Lex… Thanks," I mutter, trying to pry her off of me. My eyes flick to Avi, who raises a brow and smirks. "Can I meet up with you later? I've got… team stuff to do."

She nods, kissing my jaw. "Sure! Of course, sexy." Avi snorts, and her face tilts in his direction. "Who's this now?"

"This is, uh… the mascot. *Baldwin*…" I mumble, my jaw setting as I shoot Avi a scathing look.

His bright-white grin widens at Lexi. "Avi Vega. Kyran's stepbrother." He does a little wave, and she giggles.

I'm gonna fucking kill him.

"Ooh… *Stepbrother,*" Lexi swoons, the two of them exchanging flirty looks and smiles, and it's too much for me.

Spinning Lexi away from Avi, I give her a gentle shove. "Alright, enough of that. I'll see you later, okay?"

"Wait! Not without a picture from your first win of the season!" She pulls her phone out of somewhere. "Will you take it, stepbrother?"

She hands the phone to Avi, but he simply glances at it, then holds up his mitts. "Can't, sorry. Bird hands."

"Fine," Lexi sighs. "We'll do a selfie."

She angles the phone to snap a picture of the two of us. I'm not even paying attention in it, I'm too busy glaring at Eagle-boy and his shit-eating grin.

"Perfect," she cheers anyway, then kisses me once more on the cheek. "I'll see you in a bit, hot stuff."

She scampers off, and I let out a long exhale.

"Say what you want, but that girl's got charisma," Avi hums.

“Shut up,” I growl, all patience for him and his antics having now completely dissipated.

I turn my body to attack him, but he’s already running away.

“I’d love to stay and chat, but I’ve gotta *flyyyy like an eagle!*” he sings while literally dashing up the sidelines to get away from me.

Expelling a rough breath, I run my fingers through my damp hair.

First win of the season… *So why does it feel like a big fat L?*

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CHAPTER SEVEN

FuckBoiFarmer: Are you into agriculture? Cuz you sure know how to raise a cock.

Kyran

By my nineteenth birthday, we've played three more games, and won them all. We're starting off the season with a bang, and as a team, we're pumped.

Game two was an away, in Pittsburgh. We beat the Panthers, thirty-eight to thirty-one… Sort of close. But game two, which we played the day before my birthday, was a blowout on our turf. We *destroyed* Syracuse, forty-four to three. It was the perfect birthday gift, and you bet your ass I celebrated hard that night.

But there are two reasons why the Syracuse win wasn't the best night of my life. The first is because I had to watch Avi doing the shuffle the whole time dressed as our stupid eagle mascot. I mean, I'm really not trying to be a team downer, but it would be nice if I didn't know my obnoxious stepbrother was the one inside that eagle suit, watching me and grinning the whole time. It was in the back of my head throughout the entire game, and I think it might have something to do with the fury I managed to channel into more passing yards than any quarterback has ever thrown only three games into the season.

Thankfully, Avi wasn't at the game in Pittsburgh. I'm not sure if traveling to away games isn't part of the mascot's responsibilities or if he just decided not to go, but either way, it was a nice break from having to watch him dance like an idiot. But sure enough, at our next home game, there was *Baldwin*. Annoying me with his presence, which is pretty much his greatest talent.

The second reason the Syracuse win could've been better is because my father wasn't there. In fact, my father hasn't been to any of my games yet, and it's starting to fuck with my head a little. I didn't expect him to travel to Pittsburgh. but for the home games… What's his excuse? Football is the only thing he truly supports me in, yet he's been noticeably absent.

Part of me wants to call him and find out what the deal is… But the other part, the part that's infinitely stubborn, refuses to give him the satisfaction. If he's stopped caring about me in the one teeny tiny sliver he still had, then so be it.

He can fuck right off.

Unfortunately, though, that attitude is only skin-deep. On the inside, I'm obsessing about it, to an almost neurotic degree. Inside, I'm a child again, desperately trying not to disappoint him, while simultaneously doing just that, with things that are completely out of my control.

It feels like an itch I just can't reach. Which is why when Hannah called me on my birthday and invited me to come home for dinner this weekend, I ignored all my urges to tell her and my dad to go to Hell, and agreed. If for no other reason than to confront my father and find out what *possible* excuse he could have for missing my games without so much as a phone call or a text.

I'm nervous while I sit, bouncing my knee in the backseat of my Uber as it drives me to Somerville for what I'm sure will be yet another one of our forced family dinners I've been purposely trying to avoid for the last few years. It's why over summer break, I spent as much time out with friends as possible. Anything to keep me away from home; from my dad acting like I'm more of an unsatisfactory business investment than a son, from Hannah being the object of his only affections, and from Avi, whose blasé attitude and constant smiling just reminds me of what I *could* be like if I wasn't so fucked up.

But now, rather than running away, I'm going back. Dealing with all of this family bullshit, in an effort to figure out what's happening.

The Uber comes to a stop in front of my house, right behind what looks to be another Uber. I step out of mine at the same time that Avi is stepping out of his, and we both roll our eyes at one another.

"See, now… if you weren't such a prick, we could've split one," he mutters while we walk up to the front door.

“No thanks.” I grab the doorknob before he can get to it, pushing my way inside the house in front of him.

He mumbles, “Fucker,” under his breath, but I’m not paying attention. I’m too busy looking around the house with startled wide eyes, wondering why everything is different.

Most of the furniture is either gone, or has been replaced with smaller, cheaper-looking stuff. The art is all missing from the walls… It looks like when we first moved in. And I smell food, but I don’t hear Theresa’s familiar humming coming from the kitchen.

It’s just a dimly lit, barren wasteland of what our home used to be.

“Dad?” I shout, at the same time that Avi yells, “Mom?!”

Hannah peeks around the corner from the kitchen and shows us a tired smile. “Hi, boys!”

She wipes her hands on a dish towel, sauntering over. And as soon as she’s close, I can see some dark circles under her eyes. She looks exhausted and sort of frazzled.

“Baby boy,” she croons while hugging Avi. Then she turns and hugs me. “Happy late birthday, Ky. I’m sorry we couldn’t come to see you on your actual birthday. There was a lot… going on.”

“Like what?” I ask nervously as she pulls away, tucking her hair behind her ear and avoiding eye contact.

“Mom, what’s going on?” Avi asks. “Why is it empty in here?”

“Yea, and where’s my dad? His car’s not in the driveway…”

“Your father is here,” she says, as if trying to placate me, but it just brings up a bunch more questions. “He’s in his office. We have some things to talk about with you boys, but we’ll do it over dinner.”

She turns and darts back to the kitchen. “I’m just finishing up!” she calls as she rushes to the stove. “Relax for a bit. It’ll be ready soon.”

Avi and I share a look of concern before he follows after her. And I tilt my face all around the drab walls.

What the hell is going on…?

I wander through the den, to my father’s office. The door is closed, and when I gently press my ear up to it, I can hear him speaking. I can’t make out what he’s saying, but he’s clearly talking to someone on the phone. And it doesn’t sound like a pleasant conversation. My dad’s stern rumble seems sort of frantic. And then he starts shouting.

Pulling my face away fast, I stare at the door separating us, my stomach all bunched up in knots.

"Dad?" I call through the door, knocking softly. "Is everything okay?"

He's quiet for a moment before he clears his throat and answers, "Fine… I'll be out in a minute!"

My nerves are bounding around inside me like bouncy balls. The impending dread reminds me of when I was twelve years old… When my parents would have hushed arguments about me behind closed doors.

Combing my fingers through my hair, I release a breath in an attempt to calm myself down. I lean up against the wall and close my eyes.

It's not my fault.

Taking my phone out of my pocket, I open the camera just to stare at myself.

It's fine… It's all fine. You're here.

This is you.

I guess I spaced out, because a throat clearing startles me. I flinch so hard, I nearly drop my phone, chin springing up to find Avi at the entrance of the room, gawking at me.

His brows push together. "When you're done sexting with bimbos, dinner's ready."

"I'm not—" I grumble, but he's already out of the room and walking away.

Sighing, I stuff my phone away and follow him, heading for the dining room where Hannah is bringing dishes of food to the table.

"Where's Theresa?" I ask, accusatory distress in my tone.

"She took the week off…" Hannah won't look at me, busying herself with setting up dinner.

Something strange is happening here, and I really hate it. If I knew this was what they had in store for my *birthday dinner*, I would have gladly stayed at school.

I take a seat at the table, and Avi sits down across from me. I think he might be watching me, but when I peek up, he seems much more concerned with his mother's restless movements. She gets everything set up on the table, then stands still for a moment, her face slowly slanting in the direction of my father's office.

She stalks away. And a moment later, I hear her knocking on his door, calling for him to come join us. I'm getting the impression he doesn't want

to…

Something is not right at all, and what's worse, for the first time since I met him, Avi has lost that cocky, *couldn't give a fuck less* attitude he always brings with him. In fact, he seems just as uneasy as the rest of us… It's like when you go through turbulence on a plane. If the flight attendants look nervous, then you really have something to worry about.

After a few minutes, Hannah finally returns to the room with my father meandering quietly behind her. I'm watching him like a hawk, and it's not making me feel any better about this situation. Because he looks like shit.

He too has circles under his eyes, stubble overgrown, his typically pressed white dress shirt unbuttoned and rumpled.

The two of them take their seats, and while Hannah shows me and Avi a hesitant smile, my father won't even look at us.

"Dad…?" I murmur, and his jaw sets.

I witness his Adam's apple bob in his throat before he finally peeks up at me for a split second. His eyes are bloodshot… I think maybe he's been drinking more than usual.

"Happy birthday, son," he grouses. "I heard about your game this week… Congratulations."

My lips part, but I have no words. I thought seeing him would spurn on the rage I've been feeling at him not showing up or caring about my games. I even had a little speech prepared, wherein I brag about my passing yards and then tell him to fuck off.

But seeing him this way has turned my mind blank.

"Well, everyone dig in," Hannah sighs. "I made my special couscous, and—"

"Fuck that," Avi grunts, and all eyes move to him.

"Aviel," Hannah huffs. "No cursing at the dinner table. Now, eat something."

"No fuckin way," he keeps going. "No one's eating shit until you tell us what's going on."

For once, I agree with him, although I won't give him the satisfaction of letting him know it. We both stare at our parents, waiting for them to drop whatever bomb they're obviously delaying unleashing on us.

Hannah fiddles with her napkin, then peeks at my father. "Tom… we need to tell them."

"Tell us *what*??" Avi fumes, gripping the edge of the table in suspense.

My father still refuses to look at us, but I can read his face like a book. Frustration, devastation, lines of anger, resentment, and hostility… It's all so familiar to me, I feel like I might pass out.

Finally, he pulls in a long breath, then lets out slowly before muttering, "The business went under."

The silence in the room seems to echo his words, like they're pinging off the empty walls.

Okay… that's definitely not what I expected.

Swallowing a lump of confusion in my throat, I ask, "What do you mean it *went under*? What happened??"

He shoots me a defeated look. "Robert made some bad investments, covered them with our pensions... You don't need to know the specifics, but essentially, I'm fucked. We all are."

My mouth is hanging open for so long my tongue starts to feel dry, unblinking eyes causing the same. I can't even believe what I'm hearing…

My father started his business from the ground up, with a hefty start-up donation from my grandparents, of course. But still, he's been growing it like another one of his children since before my sister was even born. And it's always been his least disappointing baby.

Now he's saying it's… gone? *Just like that??*

"I'm so sorry this had to happen on your birthday, Ky…" Hannah says.

I blink in disbelief. "Who fucking cares about my birthday?! So you're saying we're… *broke*?"

"Calm down," my father growls.

"No, he's right," Avi jumps in. "We deserve to know what this means."

"Well, in case you can't tell, we've been selling things," Hannah says, clearly trying to remain positive, though I've never seen her so stressed. "Some of the home furnishings, both of our cars… I'm going back to full-time at the dealership."

"This is fucking crazy…" I rake my fingers through my hair.

My thoughts are rushing a mile a minute, all the possibilities of what this could mean jumbling inside my skull until I can barely hold my head up.

"And the house…?" Avi asks, his tone much more anxious than I thought he could sound.

"We'll be able to keep the house," my dad answers. "I'm looking for new work. I have some leads, but it will be a big transition…"

“What about school??” I cut him off frantically.

His eyes snap up to mine, but he doesn’t respond. The *silence* in this room is deafening.

Abruptly, my father stands up, waltzing over to his minibar to pour himself a glass of whiskey. He tosses it back fast, then pours another. Hannah is just watching him with unease all over her face.

His shoulders are visibly hunched as he says, “Unfortunately, we won’t be able to pay for either of your college expenses any longer.”

“Holy fucking shit, this isn’t happening…” I rub my eyes hard with my fingers.

“Your scholarships should have paid for most of the tuition,” Hannah stammers, in an attempt to comfort us.

“But we can’t cover housing,” my father adds in a blank, emotionless tone.

My heart tumbles down into my stomach.

“It’ll be fine,” Hannah goes on. “You can both move back home after this semester if you need to. It’s a short commute. I know plenty of kids who would kill to live this close to school…”

No… No fucking way.

I am absolutely *not* commuting to BC for two more years. *Fuck that.*

I’m not moving back in here. I refuse.

“This is so fucked,” Avi scoffs an unamused chuckle, shaking his head.

“So there’s just *nothing* we can do??” I gasp, jittering in my seat from the weight of the utter sadistic bullshit that is my life.

“You could talk to your advisor… To your coach.” Dad shrugs, drinking with his back to us. “See if you can apply for a housing grant…”

“Yea right.” I rip at my hair some more. “They won’t give me shit. Not when I live so close, and if anything, not until next year.”

“Kyran, living at home for one semester won’t be the end of the world…” Hannah chirps remorsefully.

Um, yes, it will. It *will* be the end of the world.

BC was supposed to be my escape. Even one semester living here could derail everything.

I *have* to live in the dorms with my teammates. I love living with Guty, and being able to see my friends whenever I want. If I moved in here, I’d be stuck with my father, a man who barely gives a shit about me, his suffering new wife, and… Avi.

No. No, I don't want this. This sucks ass.

"Tom, please sit down and eat something," Hannah hums in a small, pleading voice.

But he simply grunts, "Not hungry." He pours himself another glass of liquor and stomps away, back to his office.

The door slams, and with that, the conversation is over.

My *life*, as I know it, is over.

My plans, everything I've been trying to do… Everything I've been fighting like hell to overcome…

It's all blown up right in my face.

A memory pops into my mind… Of my father telling me and my sister that he and my mother were getting a divorce. The look he shot right at me, before stalking away into his office and slamming the door…

You can't escape it.

You never will.

Nothing you do will ever be good enough to fix the damage you caused.

"You know what…" I scoot my chair back and stand up, pushing past the headrush that wobbles me a little. "I'm not hungry either."

Feet carrying me in the direction of the stairs, I march up them, numb to the world as I go. The lack of control I have in this situation is daunting, building severe pressure inside my skull like a migraine. Slamming my bedroom door, I lean up against it and struggle to breathe.

This can't be happening… It can't be.

After everything I did to get myself out… I can't lose it all just like that.

Pushing myself off the door, I stumble over to my bed and plop down onto it, stuffing my face into the pillow.

Last year was amazing… Freshman year at BC, making new friends, the parties, the football… I was finally *away*. Free from the nightmares and congested memories. I can't possibly go back to living here…

He doesn't fucking want me here.

A few minutes of stewing later, there's a knock on my door. A small sliver of hope rustles awake inside me… that maybe it's my father coming to talk to me. To tell me it *wasn't* my fault, and that he still loves me, no matter what.

But as I sit up and croak, "Yea?" the door swings open to reveal the last person I want to see right now.

“Hey…” Avi shifts his weight in the doorway. “How are you holding up?”

Shaking my head, I flop back down. “What do you want, Avi?”

When he doesn’t respond, I peer over at the doorway again to find him chewing on his lower lip. “You know, this sucks for me too…”

“Oh, really?” I scoff. “You don’t even *like* school. Moving back in here wouldn’t matter to you, just like having to transfer somewhere else wouldn’t. You don’t *care*… about anything.”

“Yes, I fucking do.” He steps into the room. “I’ve made friends at BC too, okay? Just because I’m not a superstar football quarterback, doesn’t mean I have nothing to lose.”

I roll my eyes.

“You’ll always have more opportunities than me, Kyran.” He slumps down onto my bed, and I pull my knees to my chest to get away from him. “You can probably just apply for housing through your fancy football scholarship. But I don’t have that option. I’ll be lucky if my assistance even covers full tuition.”

“Get out of my room, Avi.” Melancholy escapes in my tone, though I really don’t want him hearing it. “There’s nothing worse than having to feel this way in front of you.”

“Why? Because I couldn’t *possibly* understand what you’re going through??” he grumbles in frustration. “God, you’re fucking self-absorbed. This isn’t only happening to you, Kyran. It’s happening to all of us. The first time I’ve ever cared about something… The first time I’ve ever been able to get something that’s more for people like you than people like me…”

Flinging upright, I hurtle a glare at him. “Oh, *poor* Avi. Middle class is *so* difficult. You have no idea the kinds of things other people have had to deal with.” His forehead lines and he stares at me while I gulp and backtrack. “You’ll get over this because you *can*. It’s easier for you…”

“What does that even mean…?” he mumbles.

“Never mind,” I grunt, standing up because I just have to get away from him.

I can’t stand being next to him for one more second, especially with him looking at me the way he is.

Stalking to the doorway, I pause to say, “I guess I’ll see you back at school… for however long we have left.”

And with those despondent words, I head downstairs and leave, ordering an Uber back to campus. The entire twenty-minute drive, my mind is racing through the torment that drives my determination.

In my hands are the lines of roads between captivity and escape.

I have to figure this out. I can't be crushed down again…

Not this time.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

Arora626: Why does this video make me want a Costco hotdog?
MirrorMirror: Can I pleaseee be your Fluffer? *Bats lashes*

I might have lost my mind.

No, seriously.… I think I've gone completely *loco*.

Let me tell you how the last two weeks of my life have been going, and then you can corroborate my claims.

Approximately fifteen days ago, I found out that my mother's husband, my stepfather, Thomas Harbor, is broke. *Like, broke as a joke.* Meaning no extra funds for anything, especially his stepchild.

The credit card that I had for emergency purposes—which was conveniently how I paid for all my food, clothing, transportation… literally *everything*—stopped working two days later. It was pretty humiliating being an almost twenty-year-old calling Mommy and begging for a few bucks to feed myself until I can find a job on campus. But I had no other option. All the accounts dried up almost immediately, including my own, which, let's face it, only had money in it because my mother would deposit some every week.

I haven't had a job since we lived in Brooklyn and I worked a few hours here and there at the Starbucks down the block after school. When we moved, I'd planned on finding something, but then Mom married Tom and it didn't really seem necessary. He paid for everything. She'd even scaled back to part-time work at the Mercedes dealership…

But now she's back to working sixty hours a week, and supporting our entire family, which has increased by two mouths, until Tom finds something new.

It's a big fucking mess. Boston is almost as expensive as New York, which is ridiculous because it's like a million times smaller. Things on the BC campus are discounted for students, but not by much. So now, it's goodbye morning lattes and the constant DoorDashing to feed my endless munchies… and hello Maruchan ramen noodles in a stupid fucking Styrofoam cup.

What a cliché… a college student surviving on Cup of Noodles. God, this blows.

And the craziest part of it all is that I *should* be living in the lap of luxury!

A week before the start of this semester, I was informed that because of a lack of available space last minute and some miracle of divine intervention, I was being switched from the Walsh Residence Hall to the Thomas More Apartments; the fanciest, most sought-after part of BC housing. Usually, you have to be rich as fuck, or a Senator's kid or something to get in there. And now *I*, little Avi Vega from Brooklyn, am living here out of sheer dumb luck.

And to top it all off, my newly assigned roommate, Ash Holloway, never showed up. No one's told me what happened to him, or why he's suddenly absent from school, but I can't say I'm mad about it.

I sort of know Ash Holloway… He went to Somerville High. But that doesn't make us friends, or mean that I'm bummed he isn't here. Because I now have a suite-sized double-dorm to *myself*. It's been two months, and I haven't heard shit about where my Aussie musician roommate is, or if he'll ever be gracing me with his presence.

Basically, I'm living the dream. Except that I'm not, because all the fantastic plans I'd made, to furnish my new *penthouse* and throw extravagant Playboy-style parties, have been stubbed out by the lack of funds. Luckily, I was able to buy some nice bedding and kitchen stuff on Tom's credit card before I found out about his company going under. Other than that, the place is sort of sparse.

But still… it is *really* nice to have privacy and my own space.

Which brings me, finally, to the anecdote that proves I've gone off my rocker.

Frankie came over last week while I was in a downward spiral.

“What am I gonna do??” I’d asked her, pacing around the room. “I’m completely fucked… The financial aid I applied for doesn’t even cover all of my tuition for next semester, let alone housing.”

“How much do you need?” She gazed up at me from the couch in my dorm living room, her fingers steepled in front of her lips.

“Thirty-five hundred to finish sophomore year,” I sighed, then finally stopped pacing to fall dramatically onto my knees on the floor. “And another *nine grand* to keep this place.” I whimpered, petting the hardwood floors with my fingers. “I knew it was too good to be true…”

“That’s it??” Frankie gasped. “Only nine grand a semester for this place?? That’s actually really low…”

“They took pity on me and gave me the regular dorm rate,” I mumbled. “But still, it doesn’t matter. How on fucking earth would I ever come up with thirteen grand in two months?? Even with the payment plan, I won’t be able to find that kind of cash fast. There isn’t a part-time job in the world where I could work enough hours while *also* balancing school…” Pressing my forehead to the floor, I whined out of hopelessness. “Goodbye, beautiful, spacious luxury dorm room. We could have had something so special…”

Feeling a nudge on my side, I peeked at Frankie to find her poking me with her toes. “I might know of a way you can get some quick money…”

I blinked at her. “I don’t like the way your eyes are sparkling…” Her tiny smirk widened into a fully wicked grin, and I straightened. “Frankie… I will *not* rob a bank with you. I don’t think I have the stomach for it. Plus, what kind of mask would I wear?? There are just too many options…”

“Idiot,” she chuckled. “No one’s robbing anyone. Well… not *exactly*.” I simply stared at her as she leaned forward. “I have two words for you… I mean, two words smashed together for some reason.”

My brows knitted.

“*OnlyFans*.”

I continued to gawk at her for five full seconds before bursting into a boom of haughty laughter. “Yea… *right*. That’s good. Thanks, Franks, I needed the laugh.” I wiped my eyes while she narrowed hers.

“I’m being serious.”

Amusement fading, I scoffed and tossed her a look like she was nuts. “Dude, I can’t do *OnlyFans*…”

“Why not?” She sat back and folded her arms over her chest.

“Because…” I muttered, shaking my head at the tomfoolery of this conversation’s trajectory. “What would I even do? How would it even work?? I can’t do… porn.”

Frankie threw her head back in a cackle. “It’s not really *porn*.” I cocked my head at her. “Okay, well, in a way, I guess it is.” She scooted down onto the floor in front of me. “But, Avi, listen to me. You’re fucking *hot*. You have a sick body, which I still don’t even really understand because you stuff your face with junk constantly and are like the least physically active person I know.”

I frowned. “I work out ironically…”

“The point is, people on the internet would pay good money to look at you.” She smirked. “Throw in some naughty lil videos, and you’re golden, pony boy. Problem solved.”

I couldn’t believe I was actually thinking about it… But I was. The attraction to fast money wasn’t something I could overlook at that point in time.

Because the more I stressed about it, the more I knew with absolute certainty there was *no way* to make the money I needed by working a regular job. It was too late. Even forfeiting the sick-ass dorm and moving home wouldn’t solve my problem.

I needed to do something drastic if I wanted to stay at BC. Especially if I wanted to keep living on campus, in this amazing apartment that had somehow just fallen into my lap. I couldn’t possibly squander this opportunity.

And my conversation with Kyran from the week earlier popped into my head…

Somehow, I’d found myself in a place I didn’t belong, surrounded by thousands of people who thought they were better than me. If I just gave up, moved home, and switched to a less expensive school, I’d be proving them all right. I couldn’t let that happen just because my rich stepdad’s company went under.

I didn’t need him. I could fight for this myself, and *prove*, definitively, that I deserved this just as much as they did.

Swallowing down my reservations, I blinked at Frankie. “And you really make that much money? Just from recording yourself naked…?”

“Let’s just put it this way… I saved up enough for first, last, and security on an apartment in Brookline,” she told me with a sympathetic smile. My forehead lined. “I was going to wait to tell you… since you know, I didn’t want to kick you while you were down. But I’m moving in next week.”

“You’re leaving campus?” I pouted, bummed by this information. I needed Frankie around, especially now.

She’s my best friend…

“I’ll be ten minutes away. Don’t be a baby.” She chuckled, which brought a curve to my lips. “Plus, I’m throwing an epic Halloween housewarming party to celebrate, and I expect your ass to be there.”

“Wouldn’t miss it for the world.” I grinned.

“Good.” She poked her finger into my right dimple. “Now, where are we on the OF? ’Cause if you’re gonna do it, you’re gonna need help getting it set up and promoting yourself.”

My face lit up and I gasped, “Will you be my OnlyFans Yoda?!”

“Show your dick on camera you will, young Nerdwalker,” she teased, and I cackled. “No, but seriously. Strokin’ it for perverts on the internet is all well and good, but for the kind of money you need to make, and as fast, we’ll have to do some serious selling.”

“Oh God…” I rubbed my face. “I haven’t even started it yet, and already you sound like a pimp.”

“Get that ass in gear, baby girl.” She stood up fast and started snapping her fingers at me. “Time is money.”

And just like that, I was going to start stripping for strangers on the internet. *It really happens that fast.*

From that conversation, I kicked my ass into immediate gear. Frankie brought over her old tripod stand, which, according to her, is a must.

“POV shots are a hit, but you can’t do it the whole time,” she told me while helping me set up my creator account.

“Can’t I just lean my phone against some books?” I’d murmured, and she gaped at me like I was personally offending her.

“You need to be a *professional*, Avi,” she’d scolded. “The only way you’ll make real money doing this is if you look at it like a job.”

Once again stuffing down my hesitations about the whole thing, I’d nodded in agreement. After all, I had already boarded the crazy train… there was no getting off now.

Actually, there would be plenty of *getting off.*

No shortage of puns available in this situation.

In my first week as an OnlyFans creator, I've managed to wrangle up fifty subscribers, and made a few hundred bucks on subscriptions. As a total newb, I'd consider that a pretty good start. I also created a Twitter account specifically for the purposes of selling myself, and with Frankie retweeting and mentioning me constantly to her fifty-thousand-plus followers, I'm seeing new fans popping up every day.

However, as far as content goes, I'm still dipping my toe in the shallow end. I won't lie… it's a strange thing to warm up to.

I'm not the guy who sends dick pics around or records jerk-off videos of myself, so this is all very new for me. At the same time, it's easy to get wrapped up in the attention when the comments start rolling in…

You're so beautiful…

Look at that body…

Endless heart-eyes and fire emojis… I'll admit, it went to my head pretty quick.

Which is why I'm now *fully* certain that I've gone mad… Because I'm currently lying in my bed with my dick out, recording myself jerking off for the complete strangers who are *paying me* to do so.

With my hand wrapped around my shaft, I struggle to ignore my phone's camera aimed right at me from where it's locked into the tripod at the edge of the bed. I'm not an *actor,* in any way shape or form, but I've been working on learning to control my body's movements, practicing the faces I make and the little sounds… Really trying to sell it, while also coming across as natural.

It's weird at first, but if this is my only shot at making the money I need to stay here, then I'll try my very hardest to Spielberg this production into something that will have the benjis rolling in at a steady pace.

Grazing my fingers over my nuts, I squeeze them a bit before my hand slides back up, slowly stroking my cock as it fills rapidly. It's a little cold in here, so my nipples are pebbled… Not to mention that the thrill of even *doing* this is giving me goosebumps.

It's the ultimate naughty act of exhibitionism in the twenty-first century. Filming yourself doing things you should theoretically only be doing in private. And I suppose it's still *private,* in a sense.

This is just for the fans… the people who have paid money for me do it. And surprisingly, that notion seems to turn me on even more.

Hence why my dick is thick and solid in my hand, my heart thumping wildly within my chest from the nerves, adrenaline, and the thrill of it. I continue to gradually palm my cock, a teasing dance that's born out of mild trepidation. Honestly, it's kind of my brand so far. *The college student, hesitantly and wantonly exploring himself in his dorm room all alone…*

My left hand pushes my sweatpants down a little more, while the right works up a rhythm. Eyes closed, head tipped back, I writhe into the sensation of giving myself pleasure, while my mind flips through various musings…

I wonder what my fans would like to see…

Do they like when I tease myself, slowly, like this? Do they touch themselves, watching me touch myself?

I wonder if it makes them as hot as it makes me, and even thinking about it has my hips chasing the friction of my hand pulling on my cock, more and more.

This is my first full-length video. Up until this point, I've only been sharing pictures and a few video clips. And the thing that's sort of surprised me more than the fact that people are even paying for this in the first place, is how many of my subscribers are *guys*.

Call it my own naivety, I guess, but for some reason, I stupidly assumed that because I'm straight and have only ever hooked up with girls, *girls* would be the ones watching me. On the contrary. About ninety percent of my subscribers are men, and they all seem to be the most generous with the tips and the comments.

Truthfully, I'm just grateful for all of it, regardless of who it's coming from.

I've never been a macho-hetero dude. It's just not me. I've always seen sexuality as fluid for other people, and I suppose it is for me too, even though I've never been attracted to another man before.

Well, maybe not in a way that's felt obvious… I've noticed guys before, but it was always an abstract thought. I figured if I was bisexual, then my desire to hook up with a guy would take over and it would just happen. But it hasn't, so in that sense, I just call myself *straight* and that's that.

But now that I have a bunch of men watching me touch myself, telling me how *gorgeous* I am and about all the things they'd like to do to me… I

don’t know. It sparks this tiny little buzz of excitement in the pit of my stomach that I can’t explain.

I’m not repulsed by it, not even close. In fact, I think it might be what’s turning me on the most.

My eyes creep open and I peek at the camera, only to remind myself not to and flutter them shut once more, biting my lip and fucking my fist harder as a soft groan escapes me. I can’t even tell if it was for the benefit of the video or if it just happened, but I’m definitely burning up inside my skin right now. The confusion of jumbled thoughts about my sexuality is heavy, weighing on my chest like someone’s sitting on top of me. But instead of ignoring it or pushing it away, I lean into it.

I let it fuel things… The lust, the untapped desire… The curiosity of what it would be like if someone else was in the room with me right now, *watching*.

Just watching… at first. But then maybe they would come over. Slowly step up to the bed, then drop their knees onto the mattress by my side.

No… Over my hips.

Maybe they would straddle me and push my hand away so they could take my cock in theirs and stroke it *for* me. Leaning over my mouth and brushing my lips with theirs…

“Ffuck…” The word just gusts from my mouth while my dick leaks in my hand.

Squeezing it harder, I stroke faster, the fire inside me building to a roaring blaze. My left hand slinks up my chest and I brush my nipple, whimpering at the sensation that seems to be winding through every nerve in my body.

God, I want to come. I just need to come so bad right now, it’s all I can think about. I’m chasing my orgasm, fucking up into my hand with twisted and warped images in my brain of someone else getting me there.

I don’t know who it is, but it’s a person, and I think they’re not like anyone I’ve ever done this with before. I think they’re *bigger*… Like my size. Warm and hard everywhere.

I imagine them kissing down my chest, sucking my nipple as hard as I’m pinching it. Gliding lower, biting me and tonguing their way through the lines of my abs. Then taking my cock into their wet mouth and sucking on it the way *I* might…

Timid… But hungry. Nervously ravenous.

“God, fuck… *yes*…” I whisper, keeping my eyes shut tight, because if I open them, I might lose this… whatever it is.

This fantasy. This dirty, delicious, puzzling reverie.

In my imagination, I reach down for their head and feel a backwards cap, like the one I’m wearing now. I push it off and thread my fingers through soft hair, gripping it in my fist while I ride their mouth and my toes curl.

I’m so fucking close… I’m so, *so* close, and all I want in the world is to blow every thick pulse of cum I can down their throat and watch them swallow for me.

My hand is working on its own, dragging myself to the edge harder and harder, legs spreading, muscles constricting. It feels so *fucking good*, I just…

“*Fuck*, I’m coming,” I rush out the words, to no one, because my imaginary friend isn’t here.

It’s just me, stroking out my orgasm onto my abs.

But *damn*, it still feels fucking great.

My dick shoots while I whine and rasp out hushed sounds, soaking myself in streams of slick cum. Chest pumping up and down, I release every drop and then sort of melt into the mattress, ragged breaths flying out of me as I try to catch them.

I lie basking in it for minutes, until my eyes snap open, landing on my phone, the camera lens aimed at me.

Sheesh… I totally forgot I was recording for a second there.

Sitting up, I glance down at my orgasm all over my chest and abs, swiping my fingers through the mess. Then I peek back at the camera, locking my eyes on it as I gingerly slip them into my mouth.

Mmm… salty.

I wonder if they’ll like that…

Because I think I definitely do.

I’m walking on freaking sunshine.

Twenty-four hours after posting that video on my OF, I officially have over a hundred new fans, more than half of whom paid for the six-month subscription.

I can't believe I'm raking in dough like this already. I thought it would take me at least a month to get this thing off the ground, but I guess I've tapped into something because I just hit five thousand followers on Twitter. *In less than ten days!*

Boo-yah! Backwardz_Cap comin in hot!

That's my username. **Backwardz_Cap.** I thought it was pretty clever, considering that I've made rocking a backwards Yankees cap my signature in my content. I don't care about baseball, but I figured wearing a BC cap, or even a Red Sox one, might be too close to home. So I dug out my dad's old Yankees cap I used to wear before we moved here. Not that it's a disguise at all. And if someone I know from school were to happen upon my account, and subscribed, they would definitely know that it's me.

Still, I don't show my face on Twitter, or in my profile pic on OnlyFans. And Frankie's been doing OnlyFans for a year with nothing more than a little veil covering her face and no one here has found her… Or if they have, they haven't confronted her about it. I guess it's like she says… People prefer to stay discreet when it comes to porn. No one needs to know what's happening on someone else's phone screen.

Accept Big Brother… Because let's face it, he's always watching.

At this point, I almost have enough money to pay my first tuition installment, and that won't be due for another few weeks. I'm in a great position so far, but I can't get cocky. Running this thing is definitely a full-time job. As it stands, I'm on my phone constantly, sharing little clips on Twitter, constantly pimping my OF, responding to DMs from my fans and teasing upcoming videos. I also spend way too much time trying to think of original content.

People loved the jerk-off video, but I don't think doing just that will be able to hold their attention for long. *They always end up wanting more…*

For example, I've already gotten several DMs from guys requesting that I collaborate, i.e. bringing someone else on camera with me. And judging by the people suggesting it, I'm not sure they would want that person to be female…

That's a whole other thing I'm not sure I can wrap my head around just yet. I mean, if it meant raking in thousands of dollars, I'm sure I could get

on board… But that doesn't mean I wouldn't be nervous. After all, it'd be a bit of a change-up from my normal sexual repertoire.

I'm on my way to meet the crew at Frankie's new apartment in Brookline to help her unpack. She's officially relocated from the BC dorms into her new place. I've seen pictures, but I can't wait to see it in person… It looks insane.

Hopping off the train, I walk the couple of blocks to Frankie's street, counting the numbers on the large houses until I reach hers. And I have to stop and stare at it, because it's really just *stunning*.

Boston is such a beautiful city. Everything has this colonial feel to it, even the modern stuff. And with the trees all decorated in orange, red, and yellow leaves, the brisk air brushing across my face… I have to say, I like it here. I wasn't sure I would when I left New York, but now that I'm in the heart of the city, I can admit it's a pretty special place.

Jogging up the stoop of the multi-family home, I press the button for Frankie's apartment, and within seconds, the door is buzzing me in. I'm barely finished knocking on the door before it's flinging open, and I'm being greeted by all sorts of excited squeals and cheek kisses.

Micah, Zeb, and Bea are already here, drinks in hand. And of course, with my arrival, it's time to spark it up. Working my magic, I roll a fat joint for us to share in a matter of seconds, which we smoke while Frankie gives me the tour.

"Are you excited for my Halloween party?" she asks me as I help her unpack things I feel like we were just packing the last time I helped her move, a few months back.

"Oh, yes." I grin, handing her items as she scampers around the room, putting them away in various spots. "Nothing like a party full of people dressed like slutty versions of their favorite characters."

She chuckles. "Have you decided on a costume?"

"Well, in case you forgot, I dress up like an eagle on the regs. So if all else fails, I'll just show up as Baldwin and pray no one spills their vodka on me."

"Avi!" she gasps admonishingly. "You can't wear your mascot costume for Halloween. That's cheating."

"I know, I know." I laugh. "I'll figure something out. How about you?"

She grins wickedly. "I've already picked mine. And it's gonna blow your sweaty eagle out of the water."

I aim a disturbed look her way. “That’s a really strange thing to say to me, Miss.”

She giggles again. “Alright. On the topic of strange things… I have a proposition for you.”

“I already don’t like where this is going,” I huff.

She steps over, gazing up at me with her teal eyes sparkling, and I can just tell she’s up to no good.

“A few of my fans have been sort of begging for something…” she starts, keeping her voice down, I’m guessing so that the others don’t overhear, though they’re all currently in the kitchen plowing through the pizzas we ordered. “They’ve been in my DMs for weeks now, and I think if I could make it happen, it would mean some serious dead prezzies.”

I squint down at her wide-eyed expression of excitement. “Okay…”

“So, you know how we were talking about pay-per-view? Creators offering exclusive content for a higher price, aside from the subscription?” She tilts her head.

“Yea…” I mumble, wondering where she’s going with this.

“Well, I’ve gotten *dozens* of DMs asking me to do a threesome video… With two guys,” she hums casually, her lips quirking into a devilish little smirk.

Okay. There it is… Where she’s going with it.

“Mhm…” I suppress a grin. “And you want me to be one of the guys.”

Her smile widens, and she pokes me on the nose. “And they say you’re not smart.”

My brow furrows. “Who says I’m not smart??”

“I was thinking of filming it on Halloween.” She ignores me, clapping her hands together. “I’ll charge a one-time fee for my fans who want to see it, and then I’ll split the profits with my collaborators…”

“Uh, Frankie, I think you’re missing something here,” I cut in. “I’m only one guy. You would still need another one.”

“I can find someone.” She shrugs indifferently.

“But you can’t just ask *any* dude,” I point out. “They would need to be someone we can trust… Someone who will be discreet about the whole OnlyFans thing.” I pause and shake my head. “Plus, I mean… are *we* really going to hook up? We’re friends…”

I must be wearing my nerves and reservations all over my face, because she shows me a patronizing smile.

“Avi…” She sighs, taking my hands in hers. “We’ll still be friends… *Rich* friends.”

I can’t help but laugh. *This chick is wild, I’m telling you.*

“Okay, aside from that, you still need to find someone who will agree to get naked on camera for a bunch of randos, while also keeping their mouth shut about the whole thing. You and I are used to this by now… Shit, I’m still getting used to it. But bringing someone else into the fold might get complicated.”

“I hear what you’re saying, but we have the world’s biggest motivator…” She rubs her fingers together in the international symbol for… “*Money*, baby. People will do all kinds of things for money, including keeping their mouths shut. Who knows? If this works out, we could start collaborating on the regular…”

“Yea, but *who??*” I ask again, because she seems to be counting her eggs before they hatch.

Frankie stops to think for a second, her eyes darting across the room.

But before she can even suggest it, I snap, “Not Zeb.”

She laughs. “Why not?? You know he’d *love* to hook up with you…” She cocks an eyebrow, and I’m pretending like hell that I don’t feel the flush creeping up my neck.

“Yea, except that he has the biggest mouth in the entire world,” I mutter.

“Maybe not a bad thing.” She winks.

“Not the point,” I sigh. “Plus, he’s as gay as the day is long. He’s not gonna go near your lady parts.”

“Okay, okay, fine. No Zeb.” Her head slants. “What about Micah?”

“Micah is *straight*,” I hum, and her gaze narrows.

“So are you…” Her lips curl, making her look even more evil, and now I’m burning up under my clothes.

“Yea… No shit.” I clear my throat. “But I just mean, he’s not going to want to… I don’t think he would…”

“You’re precious.” She runs her fingers through my hair before I smack her hand away, and she chuckles. “Just because there are two guys, doesn’t mean you need to hook up with each other. It could be more of a… *centralized* effort.”

“Meaning, we’d cater to you,” I sneer.

She fakes fluffing her hair. “Exactly.” I have to laugh some more. “Although, I think some of my fans would like to see it go down another

way…”

My mind is beginning to wander, wading through the waist-high waters of what she’s suggesting. *Yes*, ever since I started my OnlyFans, I’ve been pondering… contemplating the idea of maybe interacting sexually with a member of my shared gender. But like with the account itself, I’ve felt the need to warm up to it.

Maybe having a threesome with Frankie and another guy could do that…

Just being near another dude while fooling around might be the perfect gateway to explore this newfound curiosity. To see if it’s even something I’d enjoy. Who knows? Maybe seeing a dick that isn’t my own right next to me in real life will be a turn-off, and then I could put this whole incessant wondering thing to sleep on the couch.

“I can tell by the way you’re staring off into space that you’re considering it, which I’ll take to mean you’re in.” Frankie’s raspy voice cuts into my thoughts.

Giving up the tepid fight, I sigh and shrug. “Fine. I’m in.” She squeals and jumps up and down, hugging onto me and shimmying us both around. “But just this one time! I don’t want to ruin our amazing friendship by adding sex *and* business, the two things that are *known* to ruin friendships.”

“Yes, yes. Fine.” She nods while releasing me, clearly trying to stifle her zeal. “Totally. It’ll just be a fun, one-time thing to make us some serious cash money, bay-bay!” she snickers while I roll my eyes, crushing my own smile.

“How are we going to locate a third member of this ridiculous little excursion…?” I mumble hopelessly.

“Simple, my dear boy.” Frankie grins. “All we need to do is find someone who needs money, and whose best interest would be in keeping this whole thing a secret.”

“Oh, that’s all?” I grunt sarcastically.

“Trust me…” She pulls her vape out of her pocket, sucking in a drag, then puffing candy-scented smoke in my face. “Around here? It’ll be easier than you think.”

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CHAPTER NINE

little_ginger_sub7: I want to be an Oreo now. The best kind? Double-stuffed
diponchipzpls: Backwardz_Cap I have a leash, pls walk me like a dog

Kyran

My first memory of being in a church was when my uncle Luke passed away.

He'd been sick for a while… Testicular cancer. Of course, I didn't know much about it at the time, since I was only seven. But when he died, I expected information. Information I didn't get.

I think my parents considered sharing the details of his illness with us kids to be *improper*. Children aren't supposed to know the grim details of how fucked up life can be. Apparently, all we needed to know was that he'd been sick, and now he was gone.

His funeral was a spectacle. In the Catholic Church, especially in South Boston, funerals are an opportunity to warn the still breathing. To make sure we know that God has no problem smiting down whoever He wants, so while you're *still here*, you better give your confession, and take your penance with an almost masochistic glee.

It's God's *gift* to us, after all… His *forgiveness*.

I remember being inside that large church on Washington Street for hours, which, to a child my age, felt like days. All of the standing and sitting and kneeling and praying… The Eucharist, the sanctification and purification… All that smoke everywhere, the hymns. The *rituals* of it all I got my fair share of in the years that followed. But this one moment in particular, at my uncle's funeral, I vividly remember the fear.

It was the first time that I actually *feared* God.

Not only the scary priests with their serious, solemn faces, or my father with his stern, judging eyes. I remember fearing that if I didn't do *exactly* what God wanted me to do, He would take my life, and I would end up lying in a wooden box while people cried and knelt and prayed for absolution.

The whole thing seemed much less about my uncle and more about making sure we understood the black and white of it. The good versus the evil. Anything that didn't serve to please God would bring punishment, unless you confessed it. And I didn't want to be on the receiving end of that type of judgement.

I became terrified of making a mistake. Of accidentally slipping up, doing something wrong and *sinning* in the eyes of the Father.

That fear is what led me through years of blind compliance. Attempting to overcome it was the first actual mistake I made.

Sitting on a wooden bench in the locker room reminds me of sitting on those hard, purposefully uncomfortable pews inside the Cathedral of the Holy Cross. When I open my hands, I see the lines of my palms covered by the rosary my father handed to me that day…

"Plead for salvation, Kyran… Loud enough that He can hear you."

Closing my eyes, I squeeze them shut, clenching my hands into even tighter fists. I grip so hard my fingertips dig into my palms… And then I release them.

Releasing my fists slowly, I *remember* it slipping away…

"Hey…" A voice startles me, and my eyes shoot open, face springing in the direction of the doorway.

It's Avi, wandering slowly into the locker room, still half-dressed in his mascot costume with only his head exposed. Even rolling my eyes at his presence feels exhausting right now.

He takes a seat next to me on the bench, and I just shake my head. "What do you want?"

He's quiet for a moment, and I can feel his gaze on the side of my face, but I'm not in the mood to look.

"I just figured I'd check on you…" he says.

I let out a tired breath. "Leave me alone, Avi."

"It's just one game, man," he mumbles. "Five-and-one is still a great record."

“You don’t know shit about shit,” I grunt, raking my fingers through my hair.

I really don’t want to hear it right now. From *anyone*, but especially not from him. He doesn’t understand how important football is to me, because *nothing* is important to him. He doesn’t care hard enough about anything to be devastated over a loss like this.

Tonight was the first game I played since finding out about my dad’s business going under. And I just couldn’t get it out of my head…

For two weeks, I’ve been stressing the fuck out over being suddenly broke. And I know, it makes me sound like such a whiny, privileged brat, but I can’t help the way I was raised. We’ve never *not* had money. It’s like going from a massive head-start in the race to being dropped smack-dab in the middle with everyone else.

The insecurities I try so desperately to swallow down on a regular basis were all suddenly climbing up my throat faster than projectile vomit.

Maybe I’m not special… Maybe I’m not good enough to lead this team to the playoffs and get us a championship. Maybe everything I’ve ever had was given to me out of circumstance. Being a rich white kid was the cushy insulation, and after losing the rich *part, I’m just another boring white boy in Boston, struggling to show the world an image that doesn’t even exist.*

Having an existential crisis is never convenient, but having one in the middle of an important game against Georgia Tech was like the perfect storm for a disastrous failure. No matter how loudly Coach screamed at me, or how many looks Guty and the rest of the team gave me on the field, I just couldn’t push past it…

The idea that I’m nothing but a fuck-up who’s been posing as an all-star this whole time.

GT kicked our asses twenty-one to three, and even though no one said it outright, I just *know* they’re all pissed at me. Our defense held out strong. Really, everyone played great.

Everyone but me.

“I know that the Yellow Jackets are a great team,” Avi goes on, and my teeth grind together. “I know there were a few bullshit calls, and I know you guys did your absolute best. It’s *one* loss at the beginning of a stellar season, Ky. Stop wallowing in it. That’s not your style.”

Tilting my face in his direction, I narrow my gaze. “What’s with the pep-talk? We’re not *friends*…”

“Yea, no shit,” he sighs. “I just figured you could use it. This whole no money thing definitely just smacked us both upside the head.”

I sit in silence for a second, contemplating if I even want to keep talking to him about anything. But again, I’m too tired to fight.

“There’s just so much riding on this now,” I mutter. “The scholarship relies on me *winning*, and I was denied financial aid for housing because of the assets my dad still has in his name. And to top it all off, the backwards-ass rules state that if I’m not living on campus, I don’t qualify for the scholarship at all. It’s completely ridiculous.”

Avi lets out a breath. “That is pretty fucking asinine…”

“So forgive me for not being in the mood to shoot the shit with you, *bro*. But I kind of just want to be alone…” Standing up, I aggressively untuck my jersey and pull it over my head, whipping it across the room.

For the first time since he sat down, I glance at Avi, our eyes locking as he stares up at me. He’s not smiling, or smirking, which, for some reason, makes me feel both better and worse at the same time. I can’t tell if he’s pitying me, or if this situation is just so glum that he’s finally lost the will to chuckle at the rest of the world like it’s all a big joke.

Breaking our eye contact before it starts to piss me off even more, I remove my shoulder pads, dropping them onto the floor. Avi stands up while I keep my gaze on my feet, kicking off my unlaced cleats.

“You should come to Frankie’s party tomorrow,” he says, causing my eyes to spring back to his. “I’m not sure if you heard, but she’s having a huge Halloween party at her new place in Brookline…” I shake my head, because *why would I care?* “It’ll be a ton of fun, and I think we deserve to have some fun, what with all this bullshit going on.”

“I’m sure you haven’t delayed your nonchalant, fun-loving stoner lifestyle just because of all this…” I mutter.

“Good point.” He smirks, and I roll my eyes. “No, but seriously… I know you don’t want to hang out with me or anything. But you should come by. Take your mind off everything.”

I squint at him. It’s more than odd for him to be inviting me to his friend’s party. But then Avi is a strange person, so who knows what he’s ever going to do…

All the other Halloween parties will be on campus, which automatically means they run the risk of being shut down by campus security if things get too rowdy. Going to Brookline would guarantee a wilder night.

But then I'd have to spend it around my annoying stepbrother and his oddball friends.

I'm not really even in the headspace to think about a costume party right now, so I simply shrug. "I probably won't."

"Well, I think you should." He stands firm, placing his hands on his hips.

"In case you haven't picked up on this in the years we've known each other…" I lift my brows at him, "I don't care what you think."

"Pleasant as always, superstar." He grins, turning to leave. But he pauses and says, "Don't forget to dress up!"

He struts away from me, and I call after him, "Take that stupid thing off. You look like an idiot."

"Can't!" he shouts over his shoulder. "I'm not wearing anything underneath."

Shooting a wink at me, he swings out of the locker room, leaving me with the lingering frustration of being near him.

Puffing a solemn breath, I shake my head. There's absolutely no way I can go to that party tomorrow. *Unless someone wants to see a Michael Myers-style murder happen IRL.*

I've spent hours debating this decision. Enough that even as I'm shuffling off the Green Line and up the block toward Frankie's house, I'm still considering turning around and going back.

There's a Halloween party currently taking up our entire floor in the dorms. Everyone pretty much just parties in the halls, wandering in and out of rooms that are all fully stocked with booze and party favors, students dressed in all kinds of costumes and celebrating what is by far the most fun holiday when you're our age.

When I left, Guty was dressed as Negan from *The Walking Dead*, and insisting that I stay and *get weird* with him and our friends. And as much as I do love hanging out with them, I just had to get away from my teammates for the night. After the loss yesterday, I'm still not really in the mood to

deal with it. Not that I think they'd be giving me shit—not *directly*, anyway. But I figured a change of scenery might be what I need right now.

Also, it'd be nice to avoid Lexi after I've spent all week dodging texts from her about us dressing up in couple's costumes.

So that's it. Avoidance and denial—*my bread and butter*—are drawing me to Avi's friend's house in Brookline for this Halloween party. And I have just enough lackluster energy to walk up the steps and deliberately ignore all of the bizarrely dressed partygoers I pass along the way.

You just have to numb yourself with alcohol until the party at the dorms inevitably gets shut down. Then you can go home, crawl into bed, and feel sorry for yourself alone.

The moment I step inside Frankie's apartment, I'm regretting coming here. The place is *packed* with people, all decked out in all manners of crazy costumes, leaving me to feel even more insecure about mine. I didn't have the time, energy, or money to spend on a cool one, so I just grabbed the cheapest thing I could find last minute—a black and yellow karate outfit from *Cobra Kai*.

Not to mention that none of my friends are here, so there's none of the usual hype when I show up at parties where people actually care about football to rely on. Still, I recognize a few faces, who shout *"what's up"* at me while I make a beeline to the nearest visible alcohol.

In the kitchen, I find a cooler stocked with cans of beer. Grabbing one, I crack it open and chug the entire thing before even sparing a glance at anyone. Dropping the empty on the counter, my eyes shift to someone I recognize as one of Avi's friends standing right next to me. Micah Torres. He's dressed in a black suit with fake blood and viscera splattered all over the front, and on his face.

"Sup…" I grumble, cracking open another beer.

"Hey…" He looks around, like he's expecting the rest of the football team to come barging into the room to crash their party.

Taking a few large gulps from my second beer in less than one-minute, I swallow and tilt my head. "Who are you supposed to be?"

He grins. "I'm the Secret Service agent who shot JFK by accident."

Jesus Christ… I blink at him in silence for a few seconds before finishing my beer.

"Hey! Look who showed up!"

The familiar voice grates on my nerves as it always does, and I close my eyes for a moment. *This was clearly a bad idea.*

Avi stomps over to me, plucking the material of my shirt between his fingers. I jerk away from him.

"Billy Zabka?" He cocks a brow, grinning while looking me over. "Ahh, Cobra *Ky*! That's clever."

"Yea, and who are you?" I take in his hair tied back, and the slightly oversized suit with blood on the shirt, then nod in Micah's direction. "The guy sitting next to him who couldn't find a tailor?"

Micah snorts while Avi purses his lips. "Uh, no. I'm Vincent Vega." My eyebrow cocks, and he gives me a look like I'm an idiot. "John Travolta from *Pulp Fiction*."

"I know who Vincent Vega is," I mutter, choosing not to encourage him by mentioning that *Pulp Fiction* just so happens to be one of my favorite movies ever.

"Best fictional Vega." He grins with pride.

"I guess… if you consider a heroin junkie who blows people's brains out by accident the *best*," Micah scoffs, and I can't help but chuckle.

"It was the nineties." Avi shrugs, his head swinging left and right. "Plus, my Mia Wallace is around here somewhere…" He spots someone across the room and points. "Ah, there she is."

I follow his eye line to where his friend Zeb is wearing a black bob wig and a large white dress shirt with makeup running down his face and a needle sticking out of his chest.

"Hey, Mia! That's not coke, ya know!" Avi shouts, and Zeb turns around, drawing a square in the air with his fingers.

Avi bursts out laughing. *God, what a dork.*

"I'm surprised to see you here, superstar," Avi says to me, grabbing a couple of solo cups and pouring liquor into them. "I definitely didn't think you'd show."

"I'm just here for the booze." I reach into the cooler for another beer.

"Well, in that spirit…" He hands me one of the cups, then lifts the other. "Happy fucking Halloween."

"Mhm." I whip back the shot of whatever he just poured, not giving a single fuck what it is. *Could be arsenic for all I care.*

As soon as I slap the cup down on the counter, he's refilling it. My brows zip together, wondering why he's plying me with alcohol, but I don't

bother to ask. I just want to get drunk enough to forget that I'm at a party with him on *purpose*.

I take the second shot, chasing it with a third beer while people shout and laugh, music thumping around us. There are people grinding together, making out, doing drugs; girls *and* guys wearing some of the skimpiest costumes I've ever seen, prancing around the place without a care in the world.

It's while I'm observing all of these surroundings that the host of the party herself saunters over to us. And I have to do a double-take.

Frankie's costume is *insane*. She's half-devil, half-angel, with one side of her body in white, gold, and light sparkles, and the other side in red and black. She has an angel wing sprouting from her back on the right, and a dark, ghoulish-looking one of the left. I can't believe how elaborate the costume is. The makeup is one thing, but she even has half of a halo above her head on the right side, half of a golden bra-type thing, while her left breast is covered only by a pasty in the shape of a pentagram.

"Hello, monsters." She smirks, sliding her arm around Avi's waist as she peers up at me.

Avi gives her an affectionate look, and for a moment, I wonder to myself if they're hooking up. He's been friends with her for years, and they've always been very close. But I dispel the thought, because I *don't care* who he hooks up with, picking up my cup and tossing it back again with a wince.

"So lovely of you to join us, Kyran," Frankie says, seductively. Or maybe I'm just getting a buzz on already, who knows. "We don't see enough of you, ya know?"

Avi clears his throat, and my increasingly fuzzy gaze flits between the two of them.

"You'd probably see more of me if you didn't hang out with him so much." I lean in closer to her, nodding my head in Avi's direction.

"He's such a darling, isn't he?" Avi rolls his eyes, reaching into his pocket and stuffing a joint between his lips.

He lights it and takes a long drag, puffing out a cloud of pungent smoke into the air before handing it to Frankie. She does the same, vibrant eyes stuck on mine.

"You like the digs?" she asks me.

“You mean the place, or your costume?” I take another sip from something. “’Cause they’re both pretty dope.”

Frankie is eyeing me in a way that feels sort of flirtatious, but I can’t be sure if she’s actually flirting or if it’s just her personality. Avi leans in and whispers something in her ear, seeming a bit tense with his smirk having vanished. But Frankie shushes him, then holds out the joint for me.

I shake my head. “Drug tests.”

“That sucks,” Avi grumbles, snatching the joint and smoking it himself.

“How about we give you the tour?” Frankie’s eyes sparkle, and she shoots another look at Avi, who’s practically scowling.

I have no idea what’s going on between them, but with the warmth of my rapid alcohol intake buzzing through my veins, I’m starting to think that maybe she *is* flirting with me, and it’s making Avi jealous.

And so, for that reason only, I give her a charming grin and nod, allowing her to take me by the arm. *If pissing Avi off is a side-effect of me being here, then maybe this party won’t be so bad.*

Frankie shows me around her place, which is very nice. I’m surprised by it, because I’ve never known her to be very wealthy, and there’s no conceivable way this place isn’t costing at least a few thousand a month. Brookline is absolutely *not* cheap, and I find myself wondering how she could afford an apartment like this as a full-time student with no job—at least not one that I’m aware of.

Maybe she came into an inheritance or something…

Either way, it’s none of my business. I’m just sipping from my cup while she drags me all around, and the booze is working to dull my hyperawareness because it takes me far too long to notice that she has Avi on her other arm. Before I can break away to go mingle with someone who isn’t so attached to my stepbrother, she yanks us both into her bedroom.

Avi meanders over to her bed and plops down like he owns the place, stubbing his roach out in an ashtray on her nightstand. My bemused glare is on him as he sprawls out, gazing up at the ceiling.

Okay… they’re definitely boning. Not that I care, but he seems to be pretty comfortable in her bed.

“This is where the magic happens,” Frankie sighs, finally releasing my arm and wandering through the open space of her bedroom.

“*Magic*.” Avi chuckles sarcastically, shaking his head.

“Alright, well… thanks for the tour.” I back up slowly. “But I’m gonna go… anywhere but here.”

Before I can reach for the doorknob, Frankie steps up to me again and takes my hand. “Kyran… There’s something I want to ask you. And before I do, I just need to make sure you know to keep an open mind…”

Avi laughs, then mutters, “This is an epically bad idea…” He aims an accusatory look at Frankie. “One of your worst.”

“Shut up, please, Aviel,” she sings, then glances back at me.

“Why do I feel like I’m about to be kidnapped and sold into sex slavery…” My eyes are wide as they move in between the two of them, tension working into my buzz.

“Don’t flatter yourself,” Avi scoffs, and Frankie holds her hand up to him.

“Okay, so here’s the deal,” she starts; the angel-demon standing before me. “I have a nice little hustle going on via a website you may have heard of called OnlyFans…”

Oh God, here we go…

“My standard content is just me alone, but recently my fans have been asking for me to collab. More specifically, they want to see me with two guys. And I figured, since you’re, ya know… beautiful and all… maybe you might be interested—”

“I’m gonna stop you right there.” I snatch my hand away from her. “If what you’re suggesting has anything at all to do with the three of us in this room, I’m afraid I’ll have to politely decline.”

“Told you,” Avi mutters while throwing a hacky sack up into the air and catching it over and over.

Wait… what?? I step forward, glaring at him. “You *knew* she was going to ask this?? What kind of freak are you?!”

“Alright, let’s just chill out.” Frankie rests her palm on my chest while Avi makes a motion in the air with his hand as if to say, *See? Do you* see *how unreasonable he is?*

“No, wait. You invited me to this party because you wanted me to have a threesome with you and your girlfriend??” I cackle at him incredulously.

Avi freezes, his eyes flinging in my direction as he sits up fast. “Excuse me… *Girlfriend*??”

Frankie snorts. “No, no. No *girlfriend*.”

“She’s not my girlfriend,” he repeats with conviction, and I roll my eyes.

“Okay, sorry. *Hook-up friend*… Whatever. Same thing.”

“No. Also false.” Avi scoots off the bed. “We’ve never hooked up before. This is just one of Frankie’s elaborate schemes she’s concocted to make money. And while I have to give it to her…” He peeks at Frankie and faux claps. “Brava. You tried. And I hate to say I told you so, but… Oh, wait. No… I *love* saying it. I freaking *told you so!* There’s absolutely no way this asshole would ever even *entertain* the idea of a threesome where I’m one-third, just like I really have no desire to witness whatever his idea of hooking up is.”

I’m utterly stunned right now. There’s so much to unpack in this situation, my head is wobbling.

“*Fine*, Avi…” Frankie rasps petulantly. “You made your point. I just figured if there’s anyone we know who needs fast cash…”

“What do you mean, *fast cash*?” I ask with bewilderment taking over my tone. “What kind of money would be involved in having a threesome with you and my idiot stepbrother??”

“Um, fuck you very much,” Avi grunts.

“Well, I’d be recording the video for my OnlyFans,” Frankie explains calmly. “Selling it to viewers at a price… So naturally, I’d split the profits with my *collaborators*.” She slopes her head.

My eyes shift to Avi once more. “Is that why you were going along with this? For the money?”

He nods, losing a bit of the animosity as his chin drops and he stares at the floor. “I need to come up with like ten grand to stay in school.”

The mood quickly shifts to one much more serious, the weight of Avi’s and my situation clearly sitting heavily on both of our shoulders.

But still, I have to scoff. I *have* to. “There is no way in hell I would—”

“Yea.” Avi cuts me off, squinting at my face. “We heard you the first time.”

“Hey.” Frankie grabs Avi’s hand and squeezes it. Then she shoots me a sympathetic smile. “Don’t worry about it. It was just a stupid idea. Forget I said anything.”

Shaking my head, I turn toward the door, ready to leave the dumb-as-fuck proposal in this room and never look back. But something stops me.

I'm not sure if it's just because I'm cruising down the pretty-drunk expressway, or the insecurities from my loss yesterday, or if I'm really just *that* fucking terrified of losing everything I've been working towards and being forced to move back home…

But as I stand, paused in front of the door, my mouth can't stop from asking quietly, "How much do you think we would make…?" Peeking at Frankie over my shoulder, I add, "Hypothetically, of course."

Her lips twitch. "*Hypothetically*…? Probably at least two grand each, maybe more."

My lashes flutter in a rapid blinking that must not be disguising the dollar signs in my eyes, because she steps over to me and places her hand on my shoulder. "And that's just the beginning."

I turn around slowly, my hesitations being slowly swallowed up as I visualize that glorious much-needed *money*.

"What does that mean?" I ask Frankie, forcing myself not to look at Avi. I refuse to see whatever way he's reacting to the fact that a teeny, weeny sliver of me is actually considering this.

"The more I promote it, the more people pay for it." Frankie shrugs.

I shake my head in protest. "I really don't even see how I could…"

My eyes find Avi, even though I don't want to. He's just standing there, looking particularly shocked at how this conversation is progressing.

"I'm not into dudes," I growl at him, and he huffs.

"Yea, asshole, neither am I." He folds his arms over his chest. "Especially not ones like you."

I step closer to him. "What the fuck is that supposed to mean??"

"Alright, alright, Jesus!" Frankie steps between us again. "Seriously, I'm loving the tension here, but you two know you can have a threesome without actually hooking up with *each other*, right?"

"This is too fucking weird." I shake my head, backing off while I fist my hair. "He's my fucking *stepbrother*. I just don't see how it could work…"

"Well, no one's forcing you, superstar," Avi hums. "It's fine. Just go back to your boring old sex life with cookie cutter cheerleaders, and we'll find someone who's adventurous enough to help us make bank."

My jaw ticks, anger and frustration burning in my gut like the liquor I've been downing since I got here. "You have no idea what you're talking about. You don't know shit about my sex life."

Avi simply smirks at me, like he does, and whispers, “Then what are you so afraid of?” He inches in closer. “Worried you might see my dick and feel compelled to—”

“*Fuck off*, Avi,” I snarl. “Or I’ll record my own video of me beating you into the ground and sell it to World Star.”

As usual, he doesn’t back down, and it has me raging like a goddamn hurricane inside.

“Just think about all that money you’re giving up because you’re too scared to throw down with me in the room…” His grin widens.

“I’m not scared of shit,” I hiss. “I just don’t want you trying to touch me like the creepy little pervert you are.”

“This is already *so* hot,” Frankie whispers. “Do you mind if I record the build-up for bonus content?”

I shoot a seething glare in her direction. My mind is telling me to *run* out of this room as fast as possible. Get the fuck away from this situation and find some other way to make the money I need.

But when I take a breath and actually think about it… I know that shy of selling drugs or theft, there’s no immediate way to get this kind of cash this fast that *doesn’t* require doing something sexual you might not want to do.

So with my mind on the money and the money on my mind, I grit my teeth and sigh, “I’m gonna go get shit-faced. We’ll meet back here when I’m so drunk I can barely process what the fuck I’m doing.”

And then I storm out of the room, on a mission to locate enough booze to get me through this nightmare.

Anyone know where I can find an Olympic-size pool filled with SoCo?

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CHAPTER TEN

BalsamicVin23: foot pics? Will pay.
TaintedLove: Fill me like a Twinkie Daddy
Your_Dirty_Kitty: I need your naked bodies more than I need oxygen rn

Avi

On the edge. I'm standing, balancing, on a ledge of rampant nerves, preparing to step off and plummet into *holy fuck, what am I doing?!*

I'm usually a pretty chill dude. I mean, I certainly smoke enough weed to consider myself a card-carrying member of the Bob Marley, *don't worry, be happy* club. Sure, I get stressed and anxious—*who doesn't?* But that's what the weed is for. Outside of that, awkwardness, especially as it pertains to giving a shit what people think of me, or worrying about how they're going to react to the things I do, just isn't something I give much thought to.

However, *this*… This is a very different situation.

This is a threesome with my best friend and my uptight stepbrother who hates me. So forgive me for losing my cool just the tiniest bit. I'm sure if I wasn't six shots and three joints deep, I'd be freaking the fuck out. Instead, I'm just kind of… unnerved.

After Kyran left the room, having alerted us that he would, in fact, return for us to commence this ill-conceived gambit to make money, Frankie and I smoked a little more in her room, discussing how ludicrous it was that he said yes. Then we rejoined the rest of the party, ripped a few more shots with Micah and Zeb, and purposely stayed as far away from Kyran as possible.

Naturally, no one else knows what we're about to do. The point of this whole thing is to keep it hush-hush, so Frankie agreed not to even tell Bea, the only one out of our group who knows about the whole OnlyFans thing.

It's been a couple of hours, and while I'm trying my hardest not to even glance in Kyran's direction, I can't help but notice him any time he resurfaces. He's been drinking heavily, though you'd never know it because apparently the dude can camouflage like no one's business, which I suppose is a good thing, as it pertains to our secret endeavor. I've always assumed he's good at bottling things up, being that he spends ninety-nine percent of the interactions I've had with him brooding. He just seems like the kind of guy *no one* really knows… Who would never dare let the outside world in on what's really happening beneath his surface.

It has me briefly wondering what he could be hiding… But then I shut it down, and remember that we're not pals, and I don't care what kinds of secrets he has, as long as he stays good at keeping them.

I have no intention of telling him about *my* OnlyFans, because he already judges me enough as it is. It's bad enough I'm going to be doing this with him, of all people…

He certainly wasn't my first choice, not by a long shot.

Inviting Kyran to the party had nothing to do with the threesome. I was just genuinely feeling bad for him, seeing how mopey he was after losing the game. I know I must be an idiot, because I always find myself in situations where I'm the one reaching out, trying to keep the peace with him, and he continually wants no part of it. But I can't seem to help myself. He's my stepbrother, and even though he appears to be Mr. Popularity, I can't help but feel like it *is* all an act, and in reality, he's actually very lonely.

I'd never say that to him, though, because he'd just freak out and threaten to kick my ass again. So I extended an invite to the party as yet another olive branch, mainly because I really didn't expect him to show up.

But when he did, Frankie presented me with her *brilliant idea*, which is more like the *worst* idea in the history of threesomes. Naturally, I was more than a little skeptical. Still am. Because despite the fact that he somehow, against all logic, actually agreed to this, I'm nowhere near foolish enough to think it'll go off without a hitch.

It's common knowledge that Kyran hates my guts. Not that I'm his biggest fan either, but he *actively* wants to choke me to death half the time,

and I still haven't pinpointed exactly why.

Well, I'm sure after tonight, there will be one more reason to add to his list.

When I decide I just can't drink and wait anymore, I follow Frankie into her bedroom to question my sanity in private. I'm wearing a hole in the fuzzy pink rug in the middle of her bedroom as she pulls a small vial out of her panties.

Dumping a tiny bump of something onto her hand, she snorts it back before holding it up to me. "Want some?"

My brows lift. "Molly?" She nods. "No thanks. I don't think it will help…"

"Trust me, it will," she sighs.

"No. It *won't*." I shake my head, continuing my pacing. "He fucking despises me, Frankie. I need to keep a clear head in case he tries to kick my ass."

"You really need to relax." She plops down on her bed, then flops onto her back. "He's uptight enough for the three of us. I can't have you tensing up too. It'll ruin the whole vibe."

"Vibe?? Kyran doesn't *vibe* with me…" I mutter, stopping to glare at her. "Unless your idea of vibing is threatening to murder someone all the livelong day."

She shrugs. "Whatever. At this point, I feel like my fans will pay extra just to watch you guys arguing. The tension between you is insane… When he's glaring at you, nostrils all flaring, muscles flexing… I'm on pins and needles, just *itching* for him to kiss you."

She bursts into a fit of giggles while my face scrunches at her like she's more than a few screws loose.

"He doesn't want to kiss me, he wants to *kill* me," I grunt, brushing strands of hair away from my face.

"Okay, well, the line between those two desires is pretty freaking thin, loverboy."

Blinking at her for a moment, I scoff, then shake my head. She doesn't know what she's talking about. Kyran is as straight as they come, and I'm positive the endless frustration I seem to spurn in him is based solely on the fact that he thinks he's better than me. *Kissing has nothing to do with it.*

Pushing these thoughts away, I stagger over to the bed and kneel down next to Frankie. I need to focus on the task at hand; making this video as

believable as possible for the fans, so we can make as much *money* as possible without having to worry about doing it again. Because I'm certain, especially where Kyran is concerned, this will be the first, last, and *only* time this happens.

Leaning over Frankie, I grasp her by the jaw and lower my lips to hers, pressing a gentle yet thorough kiss on her mouth. Just to see how it feels, set the mood, and I guess distract myself from the other party, who will soon be showing up and making everything a million times more stressful.

I go to pull back, but Frankie threads her fingers through my hair, keeping my lips on hers as she kisses me back, slipping her tongue into my mouth. She tastes fruity, and her tongue is warm and slippery as it brushes mine. Easing into it, we sort of fall into making out, and while it definitely feels good, I'm vaguely aware that she's my best friend, and this needs to be strictly professional, so as not to ruin what we have together.

A throat clears, distracting us from sucking face, and we both pull apart, breathless and aiming hooded gazes at the doorway.

"Starting without me?" Kyran grumbles, closing and locking the door behind him.

He stands firmly planted in front of it, crossing his arms over his chest, eyes dark and intense. Not a single shadow of anticipation on his face, which just proves my point.

This is going to be just awful.

I sit back on the bed while Frankie slithers off, making her way over to the tripod.

"Okay, ground rules. First off, this is about *money*, not *feelings*," she announces. "Just think about all the yummy cash we'll be making, and it'll help your cause, I promise. Second, you need to sell it." She sets up her video camera, peeking at Kyran. "Do you think pornstars actually like each other? No. They're *acting*. We're all aware that you two aren't besties. Get over it."

My eyes flit to Kyran, and his meet mine. His jaw is visibly tight, and I lift my brows at him, to which he rolls his eyes.

Yea, motherfucker. Calm down. This is just business.

"I'll be blurring faces, so don't worry about that," Frankie goes on. "And as far as what we can do… nothing is off limits for me. I'm good with everything."

Kyran and I continue to hold one another's eyes, both refusing to back down, which is how it seems to always go with us.

Finally, he murmurs, to me, "Just don't touch me if you want to keep breathing."

"Aww, but how will I restrain myself??" I croon sarcastically while he seethes.

"Okay, then. And lastly…" Frankie ignores our boundless bickering as she double-checks the position of the camera before turning to us and smiling. "Let's have fun!" She motions to the bed. "The view will be from there to there, so try not to leave the area. Avi, will you get the lights, please?"

Exhaling out my remaining hesitations, I get up and switch on the overhead lights, using the dimmer to get it low enough to set the mood, but also bright enough that the quality will work. Then I switch off the bedside lamp as Frankie turns on the ring light.

The whole time we're messing with the lighting and Frankie is setting up to record, Kyran is just standing by the door, awkwardly shifting his weight like he hasn't the slightest clue what to do with his body. Just seeing how tense he is reinforces how insufferable he's most definitely going to be this entire time.

I wish he *would do some drugs. Damn, he clearly needs it.*

Getting things started, I kick off my shoes, then remove my jacket and tie.

"Kyran," Frankie says his name, and his face jumps in her direction, as if she startled him out of some troublesome overthinking. She flicks her hand toward the bed. "Come now. We don't have all night."

He breathes roughly, tiptoeing closer. "This is fucked…"

"Get over it, superstar." I unbutton my shirt. "It's happening. Channel your horrendous attitude into at least *acting* like you're fun."

"I *am* fun." He scowls, removing his headband and tossing it onto the floor. "But I honestly think taking my clothes off in front of you sounds like a waking nightmare."

"Hm. Interesting." I shrug out of my dress shirt.

His eyes do a very quick drop over my shirtless torso before coming back up to mine. Then he tugs his shirt over his head.

I'm not going to look at his body, because I already know it's immaculately chiseled into exactly what you'd expect from a football

player who spends exorbitant amounts of time working out. But I'm highly satisfied with the tiny glint of surprise I catch in his eyes when he sees how defined *I* am.

Maybe it's a generally accepted stereotype that artsy emo nerds like myself don't have six-packs and carefully sculpted pectorals… and that's exactly why I enjoy working out as much as I do.

I like proving people wrong, and we all know how much I adore being *different*. So when the haters expect me to whip off my shirt and reveal a scrawny torso scattered with careless ink, but they instead find me ripped as hell, draped in intricate, artistic tattoos… I can't help but feel smug.

That's right, Number Nine. My body is bangin' too.

"Scared yet?" I smirk at Kyran, to which he hits me with his signature scowl.

"If you keep running your mouth, there's no way I'll be able to get hard."

Unbuckling my belt, I open my pants and leave them that way, tilting my head at him. "There's nothing to be ashamed of, Ky. A lot of men suffer from erectile dysfunction. I mean, not men your age, but—"

"Shut the fuck *up*, Avi," he growls, inching in closer to my face.

Frankie steps over to the bed, grinning. "Yes, this is *great*. Build the hostility… Fuel that *hatred*."

Kyran's eyes slink over to her, then back to me, and I witness him swallow. I can tell he doesn't really know how we're supposed to start this, and truthfully, neither do I. So I move away from him, putting Frankie in between us like a buffer. She takes the lead, running her hands up his chest, slowly, reaching for his face.

He's visibly stiff, clearly nervous and trying to act like he's not. But he allows Frankie to yank his mouth to hers, and they start kissing.

Alright… So I guess we're off to the races.

Frankie shoves Kyran into a seated position on the bed, then straddles his lap, kissing him while slightly turning so the camera can capture as much as possible. Moving behind her, I kiss her neck and run my hands down her sides to her ass. Unfortunately, Kyran must have had the same idea, because his hands are already there, and I end up covering his with mine.

We both flinch, and I jerk my hands away fast while he rumbles into Frankie's mouth, obviously wanting to complain about me touching him by

accident. Thankfully, she doesn't give him any leeway to do so, and I appreciate her for it.

She crawls over Kyran even more until he's reclining on the bed while simultaneously kicking off his shoes. Kneeling behind her, I'm trying like hell to avoid his stupid long legs. I reach for her ass, cupping it in my hands and pushing her down on him, helping her grind on him.

Right off the bat, it's weird, and annoying, being close to him like this while struggling not to touch him at all. The only thing in between us is Frankie, and hopefully she can absorb all of his hostility toward me, maybe even somehow subdue him into calming the fuck down a little.

Immediately, I notice how he submits to her. I would've assumed he'd be trying to regain control, but he doesn't seem interested in that at all. He's just lying back and letting her make out with him, his hands resting almost timidly on her waist. Eventually, she grabs his hands and shoves them onto her tits, at which point a little huff of a sound escapes him.

It's kind of interesting. Maybe he's just nervous because he's hyper focused on the camera recording us, or maybe it's because I'm here… But he seems unexpectedly shaky.

I know for a fact he's been hooking up with girls since high school, but maybe I struck a nerve before with my taunting him earlier because it's *true*. Maybe he really *hasn't* done anything even remotely exciting in the bedroom, and now he's just diving head-first into a threesome with his stepbrother and one of the most sexually adventurous girls I know.

Oh, boy… If that's true, he's in for it.

Leaning over Frankie's back, I resume kissing her shoulders, wrapping her hair around my fist and pushing my crotch into her ass. I won't lie, it's a little strange to be doing this with my best friend, but I also happen to know how casual she is when it comes to hooking up. And if Bea and I could fool around and remain friends, then I have to hold out that the same can be said for Frankie and me.

My dick is growing, from the hormones in the air and the friction of Frankie's ass writhing against it. And when I'm sure she can feel its rigidity jamming between her cheeks through my pants and the skimpy material of her costume, she lets out a breathy moan in between her rampant sucking of Kyran's lips.

Gazing down, I catch him glaring up at me, shooting me with a fiery look that both locks me in unease and sets off a need inside me to continue

fucking with him. It's so *easy* to piss him off, it's barely even a challenge. And while I know I should just leave him alone, I hate backing down, especially to preppy dickheads like him. *If he can dish it out, then he needs to be able to take it.*

So in that spirit, I allow my hand to *accidentally* slip off of Frankie's hips and onto his.

This time, he whips his mouth away from hers and growls, "Stop."

"Oops… My hand slipped." I restrain my smirk while yanking Frankie's head back and turning her face so I can kiss her.

I can feel him seething, but I focus on sucking her mouth, teasing her tongue while her hand moves to rub my dick over my pants. It feels good, and when my eyes subtly creep open, I catch sight of her doing the same to Kyran with her other hand.

With my left hand, I slip between her thighs from behind to touch her pussy. And I feel fingers. Kyran's finger.

He tries to slap my hand away. So I slap *his* hand away.

"I was here first," he grunts.

"Yea, but I'm better at it."

"Boys…" Frankie huffs on my lips, then rolls out from in between us, flopping onto her back on the bed next to Kyran. "You can both finger me at the same time."

"No fucking way," he hisses.

I squint at him in frustration. And then we both notice that since she's moved away, I'm kneeling over his thigh with our hands touching, and there's no girl in the middle to keep us apart.

Kyran yanks his hand away from me, scooting back and whipping his leg, probably to make it seem less like I'm on top of him. But when he does, he knees me in the balls, and I groan in pain, cupping my nuts for dear life.

"Fuck you, dick!" I crumple onto my side. It wasn't all that hard of a hit, but still. *Sensitive area.*

"Serves you right," he breathes, propping himself up on his elbows. "I told you to stay away from me."

"Yea, well… personal bubbles don't really work in threesomes, dumbass."

Straightening, I move over Frankie, who's grinning up a storm like this is the funniest thing ever. I grab her by the thighs, hauling her closer while

she squeals.

Delighted giggles flee her lips as I lower my face to her tits, kissing all over them, removing bits of her costume to expose them fully. My eyes shift, and I watch her rubbing Kyran's crotch, reaching inside his pants. He still seems tense as fuck, but his eyes flutter shut when she starts stroking him from inside. Head tipping back, his Adam's apple bobs in his throat when he swallows. And I can't seem to take my eyes off the sight, even with Frankie's perky handful of tits in my mouth.

Kyran's lips are parted as little breaths leave them. My gaze slides over his chest while it moves up and down, the curves of his muscles looking so *smooth* and contoured… Complexion creamy and a little flushed.

Shaking myself out of it, I close my eyes and focus on what I'm doing, sucking Frankie's nipple between my lips. Then I slip my fingers into the waistband of her shorts, swooping them down her legs and tossing them across the room.

Moving with the mood, I kiss a line down her stomach, pushing her legs apart and positioning my face in front of her pussy. I take in a breath to steady my racing pulse before extending my tongue to give her clit a nice lick. She purrs, so I do it again, licking and licking until I feel fingers by my face. My eyes crack open, watching her moving Kyran's hand down to where I'm currently sinking my tongue inside her. And I have no idea what possesses me to do so, but I wrap my lips around one of his fingers for a quick suck before he yanks it away.

This time, I can't help the devious chuckle rumbling in my chest.

"Fuck off, weirdo," he snarls, rather breathlessly, I might add.

"Sorry… My tongue slipped." I steady myself with a hand on his thigh, which, of course, he also jerks away from.

"Stop fucking touching me," he snarls as Frankie pushes his fingers onto her clit.

He takes over and starts rubbing her, then stuffs two fingers inside her, causing her to gasp. My eyes are locked on the sight of Kyran's long fingers pumping in and out while my mouth inches closer, attempting to maneuver around them in order to lick her clit. It's difficult, and every now and again, my lips or tongue will touch his fingers, completely by accident.

"Don't lick me, Avi," Kyran threatens. "Or I'll rip your tongue off."

"Mmm… that's it. Talk dirty to me," I tease.

He makes it way too easy.

Kyran growls, his movements slowing. “I’m gonna fucking murder you.”

“Kyran…” Frankie hums calmly, trying to distract him again.

I peer up as she takes his jaw in her hand, tugging him into some more kissing. Licking and sucking on her pussy, I stare at their mouths while they move together, my tongue occasionally grazing Kyran’s fingers. But this time, he doesn’t say anything. He seems to be quivering, and it’s hypnotizing me again.

Those timid movements… It’s amazing how someone so brooding and vicious can turn so submissive. I think he’s way too tightly wound… *in need of a thunderous release.*

Stopping that train of thought, I force my focus to remain on Frankie’s pussy. Until I feel her pushing Kyran’s head down to join me.

It’s clear she wants us both to eat her out at the same time, but I don’t see how that will work for my stepbrother. Our mouths would be way too close together. Still, he allows her to move him, sinking his way down, to her tits first, but only for a second, until he’s joining me between her parted thighs.

Kyran peeks at me, watching while I suck on Frankie’s clit. Then I stop and inch away, lifting my brows at him. He looks hesitant, and combative, which surprises no one.

“Let’s see who eats better,” Frankie goads us with a grin. “A little healthy competition.”

I glance up at her and she winks. *Clever little minx.*… She knows Kyran won’t be able to pass up a shot at proving he’s the best at something.

Still, he doesn’t seem determined. He’s clearly unsure, pausing to chew on his lower lip. And when our eyes meet, up close, I can really see that burning intensity in his irises as a woven hazel. Mossy green, swirled up with the light bronze, holds me still for a second, until he breaks the contact to ease his mouth onto Frankie’s pussy.

He licks at her slowly, nervously, captivating me with how utterly *different* he seems right now. Like he’s never really done this before, which can’t possibly be true. His tongue slides over her slit for just a second, then comes back up to her clit, where he flutters it tentatively.

Choosing to help him out a little, although I know it’s probably a death sentence, I wedge my face in and lap the slit of her pussy. Our jaws bump when I do, and he hums.

“Too close,” he breathes, and I roll my eyes.

“Fuck off.” I lick her harder.

This time, my tongue touches his lip, and he reaches for my throat, curling his hand around it to hold me back.

“Choke me, Daddy,” I taunt, smirking while he pins me with an icy look.

“Cut the shit, fuckface,” he snaps, letting go of me.

But our faces are so close together, the warmth of his breath dances on my lips. Sliding my tongue over my lower like a reflex catches his eyes. And for the briefest of split seconds, the orbs of green and gold fall to my mouth.

It’s nothing more than a flash, but still. It happened.

“I saw that,” I whisper in a mocking fashion. But I can’t deny that my voice is a little raspier than usual. *Call it a symptom of this situation.*

“Fuck you,” Kyran seethes, giving up on the eating to use his fingers instead.

He swipes his thumb over Frankie’s clit, then slides a slow digit inside her.

“I see your finger… and I raise you two.” I push two of mine inside with his.

Our hands are literally flush, palms together, fingering her pussy while our eyes remain locked, stubborn meets spiteful. Frankie is falling apart at the sensation, writhing against our joined hands while we war against one another, using her body as some kind of pawn in our aggressive, oddly sexual feud.

“She likes what I’m doing better,” he rumbles, inches from my face.

“You wish.” I use my other hand to reach into my pants and adjust my erection, because it’s confusingly stiff and *aching* right now.

“Don’t you dare jerk off in front of me.” His voice cracks subtly with his words, tickling something in the pit of my stomach…

Something very inconvenient that I don’t at all understand.

“I’ll jerk off whenever I damn well please,” I growl at him, fisting my cock.

“The fuck you will.” He reaches for my wrist, trying to pull it away, like he’s actually going to stop me from jerking my dick off. It’s insane.

But my hand is still around my cock, so it’s more like he’s just… moving it for me.

“You’re making it harder…” I squint at him, lips quirking.

“You’re such a fucking queer.” His chest is really heaving now, words coming out all hoarse and uneven.

Inching my face until the tips of our noses are almost touching, I whisper, “But you’re the one jerking my dick off right now.”

His jaw is set tight, ticking visibly. “Not my hand.”

“Might as well be.” I shrug.

Frankie’s legs stiffen as her pussy clenches on our fingers. But we’re too busy arguing to even notice. Kyran lets go of my wrist, and I rest my head on Frankie’s thigh, eyes dropping shut for a moment at the sensation of stroking my cock surrounded by the pulsing heat of all this tension.

I have no idea why this feels so good, but I can’t deny that it does. And when I reopen my eyes, I catch Kyran watching my hand move inside my pants.

“Are you hard?” I whisper, and they spring back up to mine.

“Fuck no,” he hisses.

I peek down at his pants. The material is doing nothing to hide his visible erection. “Liar.”

He covers it with his hand. “Don’t look at my cock, fucking pervert.”

“Why… is it small?” I bite my lip.

“No.” His gaze narrows, and he leans in closer. “It’s *big*.”

“Prove it,” I hum, shocking myself with those abrupt words.

What the fuck am I doing??

“You’d like that, wouldn’t you?”

His voice is ragged as he palms himself over his pants, face all flushed, pink in his cheeks, pupils dilated. Our hands are slippery wet from Frankie’s arousal, palms sliding together while we work on her pussy, paying zero attention to her and just fully wrapped up in whatever this charged battle of aggression is that’s incinerating between us. It’s fucking crazy, but my head is all cloudy and I can’t even think.

“You’re so close to me, Kyran…” I speak in frayed breaths. “If I come, it’ll get all over you.”

“If you come on me, I’ll rip your dick off your body,” he growls.

God, something about this sparring is winding me up like a rubber band. I’m burning alive inside my skin, and heat is pouring off his body in waves.

At the feel of weight, my hazy gaze dips, and I find his leg slung over mine.

I don’t even think he notices he’s doing it. But now that I’m paying attention, I catch his hips moving, as if subtly chasing some kind of sensation he’s not getting because he, unlike me, isn’t jerking off.

And some strange, twisted thing in my brain wishes that he was.

I’m so fucked. This is all fucked…

“So you *are* scared…” I whisper to him, with my lashes fluttering.

He makes a low, rumbling noise, biting down on his lower lip. It thumps my balls in a heavy throb. My hips inch toward his…

But before I can get wherever it is I was trying to go, Frankie whines, then gasps out loud. “Oh my God, holy fuck, I’m *coming*!”

Her hand flies down, gripping onto both of our wrists at once, holding us for dear life as he comes all over our joined hands, mumbling, “I’m coming, I’m coming, I’m fucking *coming*…” On repeat.

Kyran’s mouth is so close to mine, it’s like I’m breathing his breaths; inhaling his exhales. I feel his lips shivering. I *feel* his pulse pumping like it’s my own.

It’s so intense that I think I could literally come myself at any moment.

But then Frankie releases our wrists, and melts into a sated puddle on the bed. And the second she does, Kyran pulls his fingers out of her, and wrenches himself away from me.

The spell breaks fast, snapping me back to reality. Blinking hard, I take my hand back, releasing my cock and sitting up slowly. Dazed, I clear my throat, watching Kyran as he jumps off the bed like it’s on fire, turning away from us.

My head cocks, wondering why he’s acting all fidgety and bizarre. I mean, I know that was intense, but he literally won’t even look at us.

Franke sits up on her elbows, grinning and patting my hair. “That was fucking wild.” Her head slants in Kyran’s direction. “You want me to get you boys off now?”

“No,” Kyran barks hoarsely, grabbing his shirt and pulling it over his head. “I’m gonna take off.”

Sloping my legs off the bed, I’m just shaking my head. I should’ve known he’d act like a whacko as soon as this was over. I stand up, glancing down at my erection, which is still rigid as hell and pushing against the front of my pants.

“You mean you don’t wanna give me a hand with this?” I tease him, and Frankie giggles.

Kyran turns, finally facing me, and of course he looks livid. But that's not what I'm paying attention to.

I think there's a wet spot on his pants…

My lips part, but nothing comes out. I'm just stunned into silence. When my eyes slide back up to his face, he's beet red, grinding his teeth in a rage. His hands drop in an attempt to cover what is obviously the result of him coming in his pants, then he stomps toward the door.

"We never breathe a word of this," he demands, shoulders visibly tight with his back to us. He reaches for the door, glancing at Frankie one last time. "The money…"

Frankie looks just as baffled as I feel as she nods and clears her throat. "Yea… I'll Venmo you."

He nods, turning away again and mumbling, "Cool. Thanks…"

Then he slinks out the door, and he's gone.

Frankie and I share a look. And in synch, our faces slowly turn to the camera.

Well, alrighty then.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

redhot32: I want u both to WRECK me while I worship u from ur head to ur toes.
GoldieCucks: Tie me up like granny's knitted blanket

Three-grand.

I made three *thousand* fucking dollars from that one video Frankie recorded, of the lamest, most idiotic threesome ever. And let me remind you, that's three-grand for *each* of us… Meaning that disastrous excuse for content actually made almost ten thousand dollars.

I've been stopping to laugh about it on occasion over the past week since it happened. I just find it all so completely absurd. And also, kind of fascinating. At the rate I'm going, I'll have my tuition and housing paid for in no time. But if we're being honest, I'm barely even thinking about that anymore.

I absolutely *hate* to admit it, but this whole thing has me on the hook. For as much as I love to bash social media-based consumerism—it's my thing; *fuck the* man, *capitalism, the evil one-percent, all that shit*—the ability to make this kind of money, so *fast*, and by doing something so *simple*, has me fully mesmerized. I can totally see how people become addicted to this…

Money is very much the root of all evils. Because it's power. Money, sex, fame, power… *Control*. They're like drugs. Preying on the weakest parts of your condition.

And I'm no better. Because I've been falling right into its trap, reading the comments and the DMs from fans with an almost salivating captivation.

I feel like such an attention whore. *They like me! They really, really like me!*

Bleh. Since when do I even care??

Apparently, I do, without reason or remorse.

I ended up sharing the video Frankie made on my own OnlyFans account, and now I'm looking at *hundreds* of subscribers, tons of whom are messaging me on the daily asking for more.

To be specific, more of me and Kyran. Or *the hot grouchy blonde*, as they tend to call him.

It's Saturday evening, and I've taken a break from smoking and sketching to check my phone, only to find hundreds more comments on the teaser I shared on Twitter, and dozens more DMs in my OF inbox.

> **Charlie421: Any plans to ditch the girl?? I would pay good money to watch just the two of you…**
>
> **SBA2234: I need more of you and that dude alone! *Six fire emojis***
>
> **WillytheKid: The tension I stg. Pleaseee a collab just you n the guy??!?**
>
> **ItsJavier33: Muy caliente mi guapo! So sexy you boys together *heart on fire emoji***

And that's just the tip of the iceberg. I have dudes offering to pay *hundreds* for private videos, detailing all kinds of crazy things they want me to do… with my stepbrother. It's fucking insane.

Of course, they don't know that he's my stepbrother… A fact that would probably have them offering even *more* money. *I get a sense these homies are down with the forbidden.*

But unfortunately for them, it's a lost cause, and that thought has me sort of wallowing in a bizarre, angst-fueled depression. I haven't posted more than a few measly pics since I uploaded the threesome video, and the lack of buzz for them has switched on my insecurities full blast.

Not only do I now feel like a failure if I don't produce for my fans, but I'm stressing about losing the high of their attention, which also makes me feel like a huge loser.

I don't know these people, and I don't owe them shit. I could close this account and be totally fine… Just chalk it up to a stupid college experiment that happened to make me a few thousand bucks.

But I don't want to do that. Like I said, the money and the newfound *fame*, for lack of a better word, have given me a sense of purpose. I know

it’s stupid, and I despise relying on other people for my own inner gratification, but I can’t help it. I want that adoration aimed at *me*.

But now that Superstar Harbor has been introduced to the fold, it’s all they seem to be clamoring for. Yes, they want both of us, not just him, but still. It’s annoying.

And pointless, because there’s literally no way Kyran would ever even *consider* going gay-for-pay. Especially not with me. It’s not going to happen, and it’s a major bummer because I’m not ready to give it up. The *fans*.

On top of it all, I can’t get the memory of how that imbecilic threesome went down out of my head. It’s been just chilling in there, woven into the fibers of my memories so I can’t help but keep harping on it.

How close we were, and how the proximity seemed to flutter like a featherlight sensation in the pit of my stomach. The anger and tension and frustration burning around us…

His leg sloped over mine.

It’s the last thing I want to be thinking about, but I can’t stop. And I especially can’t stop remembering the fact that I think something about what happened turned him on enough to make him *come* in his *pants*.

It was Frankie. It had to have been her. Fingering Frankie into orgasm must have been too exciting for him to bear, and that was why he freaked out and stormed off. I’m *positive* it had absolutely nothing to do with his dumb leg over mine or the panting breaths we shared that I’ve been fighting out of my brain for the last week.

Dropping my phone onto my desk and shoving it away from me, I reach into my drawer for a Twizzler, my favorite candy and one of my many, *many* comfort foods. Chomping off bites, I chew while staring at the sketch I’ve been working on. It’s my version of *The Last Supper* with all Batman characters. Obviously, Batman is Jesus, Robin is Peter… I’ve got Commissioner Gordon in there, Poison Ivy, Mr. Freeze, Bane, and the Scarecrow. And of course, the Joker as Judas.

It’s just for fun, like a play on the idea that the disciples were actually Jesus’s enemies, in a sense. In mine, they’re not so much sharing a *meal* as they are all consumed with their own bullshit. It’s been taking my mind off things well enough, but now that I checked my phone, my motivation to keep working on it has all but dried up.

My eyes slink back to said phone and without even noticing it, I'm chewing furiously on my lower lip. There's this tiny voice in the back of my head insisting that I need to tell Kyran about all of this hype from my fans…

I know, I know. It's the most moronic of ideas. Knowing him, he'll get pissed off, call me a *queer*, and threaten to beat my ass. It's his standard response, especially where the idea of us touching is concerned.

But then a part of me wonders if maybe he could use the attention too. *Maybe he'd be flattered by the comments the same way I am…*

And I know he needs more money. Three grand is nowhere near enough to cover housing at BC. Even with a few grants thrown in, we're looking at almost twenty-grand a year, not to mention if we want to feed ourselves and you know… do anything other than breathe on this campus.

We both need more money coming in. And with that serving as one pathetic, measly excuse, I grab my phone and pull up a text to my grumpy bitch of a stepbrother.

Me: Hey

Five minutes go by before he even reads the message, and even so, he doesn't respond. So I keep going…

Me: I need to talk to you about something important. Could you come over to my dorm?

This time, he responds almost instantly.

Kyran: That's gonna be a non-negotiable no.

What a fucking asshole. I can't.

Me: Kyran… I think you'll want to hear what I have to say.

Nothing. For five more minutes on read.

Me: Please just come over. Give me five fucking minutes of your time. You owe me that.

Kyran: I don't owe you shit.

I roll my eyes to the heavens.

Me: Fine, you don't. But like I said, this is serious.

Kyran: I don't care. Anything you need to say you can just text. I have no desire to see your face.

Me: God you're obnoxious. Look it's a sensitive subject. I don't want to text it…

His typing bubbles pop up, then disappear. Then pop up, then disappear again. I'm impatiently tapping my foot for several more minutes by the time he finally replies.

Kyran: Still no. I'm not coming over to your fucking dorm Avi

Me: Fine, I'll come to yours… But I don't think you want me bringing this stuff up in front of your roommate…

Kyran: You will not set foot in my dorm.

Kyran: And what makes your roommate so chill??

Me: I don't have a roommate. I'm by myself in TMA 446.

He reads the message, but doesn't respond, and I'm just staring at the screen when there's a knock on my door.

My brows zip together in confusion. Standing up slowly, I meander out of the bedroom, creeping over to the door while my chest tightens in suspense. *There's no way…*

Opening it a crack, I peek through, letting out a breath as my stomach drops in disappointment that confuses the fuck out of me.

"Hello, gorgeous," Frankie says with a smile, pushing her way inside. She holds up a bag from Shake Shack. "I brought you a gift."

I'm about to shut the door, but Bea slinks inside behind her before I can.

"You *both* invited yourselves over?" I grin at them, closing the door while they wander around, making themselves at home. "How sweet."

"Actually, I came by to talk to you and bring you burgers." Frankie tosses the bag onto the living room table. "I have no idea what she's doing here. I found her rustling around in the bushes downstairs."

Chuckling, I glance at Bea, who's holding her coat shut around her chest, looking awfully suspicious. "What's wrong with you?"

"Avi… I need your help." Bea aims her wide eyes at me. *I swear to God, she's all eyes, lips, and boobs, this one.* "Don't freak out."

My forehead lines while I watch her clutching her coat. "Freak out about what…?"

She bites her lip, slowly opening up said coat to reveal a tiny black kitten slumped in her arms.

"You were hiding that thing inside your coat the whole time??" Frankie croaks through bites of French fries.

Bea pouts, petting the thing's small head over and over, cradling it to her chest. "I just found him outside! He's lost, I didn't know what to do!"

My mouth is just hanging open while I stare at her, and the little cat who seems content to just sit in her arms. Stepping over slowly, I can't help but gravitate toward it. He's *so* freaking cute… And cards on the table, I'm a total cat lover.

I used to feed all the neighborhood strays back in Brooklyn, and I always play with our neighbor, Mrs. Adelman's, cats in Somerville. But I haven't had my own since my orange tiger, Bates, passed away when I was twelve. *The second great tragedy of my childhood…* Call it not wanting to get hurt again, but I just couldn't find it in myself to replace him.

But this thing… *He's just so tiny and soft.*

And yes, I'm already petting him and giving his head tons of kisses.

"He was outside all alone in the cold," Bea whines. "I couldn't just leave him there!"

"He probably belongs to someone…" I mumble, taking the cat in my arms and looking him over.

He's a little dirty and definitely in need of some food. He's just so *little*… Can't be more than a year old.

"Why are you calling it a *him*?" Frankie aims a fry at the cat. "Did you check?"

I look to Bea, who shakes her head. Lifting the cat, I check for any sign of balls, but I don't see them.

"I think it's a girl," I hum, swooning like a big ol' baby over her rampant purring. "Should I… call the shelter?"

"You could…" Bea pets the tiny ball of fur. "Or you could keep her here…"

My eyes flit to hers. "No pets allowed in the dorms, you know that."

"Yea, but you have this place to yourself!" she squeals. "Who would know?"

Oh my God, someone give me an excuse not to keep this thing… I'm falling in love already.

"That's probably some poor little kid's cat you're stealing," Frankie says pointedly, being the voice of reason I hate right now.

"I'll check for signs in the area." Bea smiles. "But you can keep her until we find her home… right?"

She aims those sparkling eyes at me, and I huff out a laugh, shaking my head. "You knew I'd be your best bet, didn't you? Temptress…"

Bea shrugs, unashamed, and Frankie scoffs.

“We could always bring her to your place,” Bea says to Frankie, popping her hip.

Frankie’s head swivels sternly. “Nope. Not happening. I’m allergic.”

“No, you’re not. You just have no desire to care for anything that isn’t you.” I laugh.

“Good point.” She smirks.

“Come on, we should get her cleaned up,” I say to Bea. “And I have no cat food. Frankie, can you go grab some?” Frankie sighs, pinching the bridge of her nose. “*Please*,” I whine, pinning her with a look. “You owe me.”

Her brow arches. “Oh yea? And what do I owe you for exactly?” She folds her arms over her chest.

I peek at Bea, then back at Frankie, choosing not to go into the whole spiel about her getting me roped into a threesome with my stepbrother which ultimately turned my OnlyFans subscribers rabid for gay sex videos.

Narrowing my gaze at her, I mumble, “Just please run to the store and grab some cat food. And a litter box. And kitty litter.”

She huffs out a sound of displeasure, but I ignore it, taking the cat and Bea into the bathroom.

“She needs a name,” Bea says, scratching the adorable little thing on the head.

My lips curl. “I’m gonna call her Robin.”

It’s almost midnight by the time Frankie and Bea leave. And it looks like I finally have a roommate again.

We gave Robin a bath and tons of food, then I set up a litter box for her in the hall closet. And now she’s happy as can be, sitting on my lap on the couch, purring away while I cuddle her and revel in the joy and comfort that only pets can provide. I know if any of the housing admins find out she’s here, I’ll have to get rid of her. The same goes for if we find out who she belongs to, so I’m trying not to get too attached. But it’s difficult when she’s just so stinkin’ cute.

“So Frankie says I’m an idiot if I don’t at least consider doing another collab video…” I mumble to my furry friend while *Seinfeld* plays on Netflix in the background. “But the fans want it to be with Kyran, which isn’t gonna happen. He doesn’t even like to *talk* to me, let alone—”

A knock on the door cuts off my words, bringing with it a wave of nerves.

“Oh, crap…” I whisper, shifting Robin off of my lap and onto the couch.

Standing up quick, I grab a nearby fleece blanket and cover her with it.

“Shh… You just stay there,” I tell the cat before rushing toward the door. “Don’t move.”

Unlocking the door, I suck in a calming breath before opening it a crack, expecting to see someone from campus security, here to tear my new baby from her home.

Instead, I’m met with sandy hair, hazel eyes, and a familiar scowl.

“Uh…” My mouth hangs open while I stare at him blankly, purely baffled by the fact that he’s actually here. Unexpectedly. “What are you doing here?”

His eyebrow cocks. “You invited me, remember? Jesus, how much weed do you smoke??” My confused blinking goes on while he rolls his eyes. “You said it was important and serious, or some shit—Can I fucking come in?? Or are you gonna make me stand out here in the hallway like a moron?”

I’m still beyond surprised, but now I’m also annoyed, because while I did ask him to come over, I’m already regretting the decision to have this arrogant jerk-wad in my home, messing up my chi.

Stepping aside, I motion for him to come in. “By all means… Show up in the middle of the night, unannounced, acting like *I’m* the unreasonable one.”

Kyran stomps inside. “Again, you begged me to come over. “

“Okay… *begged* is a bit of an exaggeration…” I mumble, and he spins to face me, lifting that damn eyebrow again.

“Want me to show you the text?” He folds his arms over his chest.

“I have the text. I wrote it, dumbass,” I murmur, then hold my hand up before he can argue any more. “Anyway, whatever. You never responded, so forgive me for not expecting you to show up at midnight.” He sways in

place, tipping his chin all around the room. My brows knit. “And drunk, apparently…”

“I’m not *drunk*,” he grunts, resuming his walking, checking the place out, poking at stuff. “I left a party early to come see what you could possibly need that’s so important you can’t text it…” His voice trails, then his face snaps in my direction. “This is your dorm room??”

“No, I’m just hanging out in here,” I rumble sarcastically, to which he rolls his eyes. “Yes, it’s my fucking dorm room.”

He scoffs out loud and shakes his head. “Figures you’d just stumble into a place like this…”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” My gaze narrows.

“You know what it means,” he says pointedly. “These apartments are reserved for the dean’s kids and full-ride MBAs, not stoners with a two-point-five GPA. Seriously, I think half the professors actually *live* in this building…”

“Hey, my GPA is a three!” I retort, then mutter, “Almost…” He huffs, still shaking his head, that constant holier-than-thou attitude really starting to piss me off. “Look, I didn’t ask you to come over to argue and insult me.”

“Okay, so spill it.” He spins, waltzing toward the living room. “What do you want, Avi?”

My frustrations with him are replaced swiftly by nerves. Sure, I invited him over to tell him the truth, about my OnlyFans and all the requests… But now that he’s actually *here*, dressed in his expensive preppy clothes, being his usual douchey self, I’m sort of fumbling for the courage to speak the words. I just know he’s going to freak out. He might even punch me in the face… Not that I did anything that would warrant such a reaction. But he’s not exactly known for his *understanding*.

“Alright, well… Here it goes.” I pull in a breath. “I have—”

“Uh, Avi…” he interrupts me, and I exhale, rolling my eyes. *Jesus, he can’t even let me speak for one second…* “I don’t want to alarm you, but I think you might have a rat…”

My forehead lines. “A what??”

He nods toward the couch. “That blanket is… moving.”

Following his line of vision, I see the lump where Robin is covered by the blanket moving around. Kyran is backing away slowly toward the

kitchen, and I have to laugh. He grabs a frying pan from the counter, then tiptoes back to the living room with his arm cocked like he's about to strike.

"Kyran, wait!" I jump in front of him before he can smash my poor kitten to death. "It's not a rat!"

His eyes shift to mine. "Then what the fuck is it??"

"Okay, let's just take that away from you…" I remove the frying pan from his grip, setting it down and turning to whip the blanket back, revealing my little Burmese fluff ball.

He stares at the cat, then at me, then at the cat, before shaking his head. "I have no words."

I'm sure he's insulting me, but it doesn't even faze me anymore. Plopping down on the couch next to Robin, I pick her up and nuzzle her head. "Her name is Robin. We just found her today—"

"Avi, this isn't a social call," he sighs. "Just get to the point… Why am I here?"

Placing Robin back down, I glance up at him. "I made an OnlyFans."

His eyes widen for a second, as if maybe he was trying to bury the memory of Frankie's party, and me bringing up *OnlyFans* just resurfaced it.

"I started it a few weeks back, after we found out the money was gone," I go on. "I've only been doing solo stuff, but then Frankie suggested I share the video we made with my subscribers to make some extra cash…"

Kyran slumps down into the nearest seat; a chair to my right. Shifting to face him, I watch as his fingers dig into his thighs, the tension in his extremities building visibly.

"Okay… and what does that have to do with me?" he mutters.

Alright, I guess we're going the denial route, then. "Well, after my fans saw it, they started sort of… suggesting…" I pause and swallow. "Or *begging*, really…"

"Spit it out, Avi," he grumbles.

"They want more," I rush the words out. "More… content like that. Only… minus the vagina."

Kyran's face is still as he stares at me, eyes slightly narrowed, frozen for a few generous seconds, during which I'm just blinking at him, bracing myself like it's that last part of *"Pop Goes The Weasel"* before the clown jumps out at you. The only sound in the room is the muffled voice of Jerry Seinfeld saying, *"These pretzels are making me thirsty."* Until eventually, Kyran's lips twitch.

And then he bursts out laughing.

He laughs for longer than I'm finding socially acceptable. Then it dies off, and he sighs through his chuckles. "You're an idiot." He shakes his head, leaning back in the chair. "I'll give it to you… you almost had me for a second there."

My eyebrows jump and my head slants. "I'm not kidding."

"Uh, yes you are," he huffs. "You're fucking with me."

"*Uh*, no. I'm not. I'm being fully serious." Pulling my phone out of my pocket, I bring up my OnlyFans account, holding it up to show him the screen.

He only peeks at it for a split second before his eyes are back on me, all traces of amusement in his expression having vanished. I witness the mound of his throat dip in a swallow as his back straightens.

"Dude, are you certifiable or something??" he snaps. "Why are you telling me this? We agreed that was a one-time thing, never to be mentioned again. And it was a fucking dumbass idea to begin with. The whole thing was just so…"

"Yea, yea. I get it," I mutter. "It was *fucking ridiculous*. But something about it worked, and I don't need to tell you that. You're thousands of dollars richer because of it, too. So you can stop acting like we forced you into something you didn't benefit from."

He aims one of his seething glares at me. "Fine. The money was helpful, but that's the beginning and end of it. I don't see why you needed to call me over here just to tell me that a bunch of creeps got off watching us…"

His words dissolve, and he shifts uncomfortably in his seat.

"I just thought you might want to know…" I murmur, then pause to figure out how to phrase this in a way that won't have him attacking me. "They were really into you. I mean, *us*… together. More than with Frankie."

"So fucking what??" he barks, clinging to his hostility like a life-raft in the middle of the sea. "We didn't even do anything! It's not like we…" His voice cuts out, and he swallows again.

Inching in closer, I tap on my phone, pulling up my inbox of DMs, which is full of even more guys pleading for content I'm sure Kyran is fully opposed to providing. And I show it to him.

"Look at all these messages…" I hand my phone to him.

He continues to glare at me for a moment before snatching it, eyes dropping to the screen. He's scrolling for minutes, the aggressive lines of his face softening just the slightest bit.

"All of those people are willing to pay a shitload of money for more videos like that one. But just… us." I'm trying to keep my tone as calm as possible, to make sure he doesn't accuse me of trying to lure him into something.

I'm just stating facts here. I don't like it any more than he does, but I'm willing to accept that this is the only immediate option for making the money we need.

"Us hooking up." His gaze flits to mine. "Stop beating around the bush, Avi. You're saying we would need to make gay porn to satisfy these fans of yours…"

"Okay, well, *gay porn* is a little extravagant…" I mumble.

"It's really not, though." He tosses my phone at me. "That's what it boils down to. You'll make triple what you're bringing in from your little jerk-off videos if I come on camera with you, and I'm telling you right fucking now, that's not gonna happen."

My brow furrows. "How do you know I'm jerking off in the videos…?"

"You just handed it to me," he hisses.

I can't help but smirk. "Why did you look at the videos? I was only showing you the DMs…"

"That's not the point." He stands up fast like he's about to storm out, so I stand up too. "The way I see it, you owe me some cash, Vega. Frankie split her profits with us, but you didn't." He purses his lips. "You're a greedy little bitch."

My jaw clenches. "Fine, *whatever*. I'll share it with you…" He rolls his eyes. "But you know how much *more* money we could make doing this. Swallow your fucking ego for two seconds and think about this rationally. You're about to lose everything you've been working for… The fucking championship." He's vibrating, eyes scorching, neck tight in his rage. But it's because he knows I'm right, and I can see that realization on his reddening face. "This is the only way we both get to stay here. The only way you get to keep being the superstar Eagles quarterback."

He goes quiet again, fuming with swirls of green and gold fury shining at me. "That's a great idea in theory, bro, but there's a hole in your genius

plan.” My head tilts. “I’m not fucking gay. I have no desire to hook up with dudes, *especially* not my dumbass stepbrother.”

I shrug. “I don’t want to hook up with you either. But for that kind of money, I could *pretend* you’re not the most obnoxious asshole I’ve ever met. I did it at Frankie’s party…”

“Yea, well… you enjoyed that a little too much.” He rakes his fingers exasperatedly through his hair.

My mouth curves into a wicked smirk as I lean in. “So did you.”

His eyes snap to mine. “I assure you, I didn’t.”

Choosing not to keep calling him out, I shrug again. “I just wanted to let you see for yourself how much these fuckers are fiending for this shit.” Easing around him, I go to the kitchen and grab my bottle of Fireball. “There’s a way, Kyran… a way for us to stay in school and not have to slink back to Somerville with our tails between our legs. You just have to have the balls to do it…”

Opening the bottle, I take a sip, wincing at the sugary cinnamon burn. He stays planted in the living room, staring at nothing for long enough that I rip two more shots from the bottle, waiting for him to process what I’m saying.

I don’t exactly have high hopes for him agreeing to this… And I’m still not even sure I *want* him to agree. It’s not like I’m as excited over the idea of us fooling as my fans are… But it’s the only thing I can think to keep their attention. Otherwise, it’s back to the drawing board.

And yes, maybe I could find someone else to hook up with… Another guy to bring into the fold, to satisfy the demand for dude-on-dude content. But that seems like a lot of work. Kyran is already involved. Plus, he’s just as desperate for cash as I am, so there’s no way he’d ever tell anyone…

And then there’s the tension. The hate that flows between us like a magnetic force. Apparently, it’s the key ingredient, and I just don’t think I’ll find that with anyone else.

Finally, Kyran moves, but it’s not the movement I was hoping for. He stomps over to the door, reaching for the handle while I sigh out of disappointment and shake my head. But then he stops, his shoulders slumping as he lets out a long breath of audible frustration.

Slanting his face in my direction, his eyes fall to the bottle I’m holding. I say nothing, simply hold it out to him. And he slinks over slowly, grabbing it from me and taking an awfully large swig.

Grumbling, he rubs his eyes. “No bullshit, Avi… I want a concrete answer.” I blink at him as his gaze lifts to mine. “How many videos would it take to make enough for housing for the next two years?”

God, that’s a complicated fucking question. Thinking about it for a second, I murmur, “It depends on the content… At least a few. But we could start with one and see how they respond to it. And the more we market it, the more it’ll work. We might even be able to just record a bunch at once, then spread that shit out over the course of—”

“Fuck…” He cuts me off with a groan of despair, chugging from the bottle again. “This is so fucked. I can’t believe I’m letting you talk me into this…”

My brow arches. “Maybe you should slow down… And excuse you. *Talk you into it??* I’m not *coaxing* you, Kyran, this is a fucking means to an end.” He gulps from the bottle again, and I grab it from him. “Okay, that’s enough for now.”

“I need to get completely blasted if this is gonna work…” He grips the back of his neck, staggering around the kitchen.

“Wait a second…” I follow him anxiously. “You want to do it *now??*”

“I don’t *want* to do anything.” He shoots me with a hazy glare. “But I’m fucking here, so we might as well just get it over with.”

Jesus fuck… My heart is jumping so aggressively it might actually manage to pop up my throat. I was not at all prepared for this…

“Okay… uh, sure. I guess we could…” My thoughts are swirling and twirling like a carnival ride as I take a big sip from the bottle myself, hoping to steady the trembling in my limbs.

And why are my hands suddenly so sweaty??

“We need to make some terms.” Kyran shuffles over to the couch and drops down.

He seems defeated, like a broken man in a way, but he’s still the one moving forward with this, at a much more rapid pace than I expected. *I mean, shit… I expected him to punch me in the face and storm off. Now he’s sitting on the couch, talking about* terms*??*

He must be really drunk…

“Terms…” I repeat the word, ambling over and taking a hesitant seat next to him on the couch, making sure to leave a few feet between us. Still, he scoots away from me, but I grab his arm to stop him. “Don’t crush my cat.”

His face slopes to where Robin is taking up and entire couch cushion, licking herself.

“First off, we split everything fifty-fifty,” he says, watching her for a moment, before peering at me. “No greedy bitch skimming off the top.”

I roll my eyes. “Fine, but you need to help with the marketing. I’m not gonna do all the heavy lifting while you sit back and reap the benefits.”

He scoffs. “Trust me, this won’t be fucking *easy*.” His eyes scan me for a split second.

I squint at him. “Why are you acting like you’re doing me some huge favor by even considering this??”

“Uh, because I am,” he grunts.

“No, we’ll *both* be doing something we don’t want to do, and we’ll *both* be making bank doing it. Even fucking playing field, asshole.”

“Fine, whatever.” He leans back, covering his face with his hands.

“Which brings me us to our next term,” I go on. “No arguing. We can’t spend this whole experience bickering at each other, or it’ll never work. It’s a *business*, that’s what Frankie told me, and she’s right. If we just look at it like a job, and stay professional, it’ll be a little easier to get through it.”

His hands slip away, and he peeks at me, giving me a look as if he agrees, but he doesn’t want to give me the satisfaction. He just nods and mumbles, “Next term… No one *ever* finds out about this. That’s the most important one.”

“Agreed.”

“No, I’m serious, Avi.” His tone has taken on an almost desperate, pleading lilt as he faces me. “If this got out, the money doesn’t fucking matter anymore. I’d be kicked off the football team. Not to mention, if my dad ever found out…”

His words fade into him shaking his head and he stares down at his hands. Suddenly, he’s all nervous and fidgety, and I can’t help but watch him, wondering once more why he’s so uptight.

I know his relationship with his father isn’t a good one… Tom doesn’t seem to give much of a fuck about Kyran outside of his grades and football, which is a huge bummer. I can’t even imagine having that kind of shitty relationship with my mom. She’s my number one supporter, no matter what kinds of dumb shit I do.

If she found out about the OnlyFans, I know she’d be pissed, but she wouldn’t freak out or *disown* me. She might even laugh about it, though

she’d pretend it wasn’t funny.

But Kyran is different. He’s wound so tightly, always worrying about how his father sees him, how *everyone* sees him. *I wonder where it stems from…*

He flips his hands over, staring at his palms in silence. It’s an odd thing to do, but maybe he’s just drunk.

“No one will find out,” I say quietly, and his eyes jump to mine. “I swear. This is just about the money, that’s it. We’ll make sure it stays a secret.”

He nods, clearing his throat as all vulnerability vanishes. In one eye-blink, he’s back to scowling and hostile, glaring at me as he says, “Final term… No touching.”

I laugh out loud, and his eyes narrow. “Okay, you don’t seem to understand how this works. These dudes are *not* gonna pay all this money for us to just sit side by side.”

“I don’t fucking care. That’s what they’re gonna get,” he grunts stubbornly.

“You’re being unreasonable,” I scoff, and he straightens.

“I’m not fucking *gay*, Avi.”

“Yea, I think we already established that.” I pinch the bridge of my nose. “But we have to at least *act* like we’re into it, or this will all be for nothing… We don’t have a choice. We have to sell it. For the fans.”

Puffing out an unamused chuckle, he shakes his head, grabbing the bottle from me. He takes a long pull, gurgling over the disgustingly sweet cinnamon flavor. “I don’t know if I can…”

“You won’t know if you don’t try.” I shrug.

He peers at me. “Well, what do you suggest? What do these *fans* of yours even want?”

My mind sifts through the insane filth they’ve been messaging me all week. “I think we’d need to start small…”

“I’m not putting my mouth anywhere near your dick,” he growls.

And for some bizarre reason, my eyes fall to said mouth. Swallowing, I stand up, avoiding everything that just started swimming around inside me from that one look while I rush into my bedroom, grabbing the tripod and my laptop.

As soon as I step back into the room, his face drops. “Oh, man… I already don’t like this.”

“Stop being such a whiny bitch.” I set the tripod up opposite the couch. Then I place my laptop on the coffee table, opening it and bringing up PornHub. “Find something on there you like. Whatever you would watch when you’re alone.”

He gives me an angry-deer-in-headlights look, to which I roll my eyes yet again. *I swear to God, they’re going to fall out of my head at the rate he’s going with this nonsense.*

“Just do it, Kyran,” I breathe, switching off the TV, then setting up my phone to record.

It still takes him a second, but eventually, he leans forward, scrolling through the available porn. I stay standing, giving him space as he settles on a video. It’s girl-on-girl, and I try to keep my scoffing in check.

Someone’s really invested in proving how straight he is right now.

He presses play and the video begins, volume down low as the people on the screen start doing their thing. And I press record on our video, hoping like hell this will work out.

I don’t want to admit that I’m nervous, but I am. Mostly because I have a lot at stake here. If we can’t make this work, then I’m not sure what I’ll do.

Kyran’s eyes are stuck on the laptop screen, almost intentionally, as if he’s afraid to look anywhere else. Slowly, I ease back over to the couch and sit down, again making sure there’s enough space between us. I can see and feel how rigid he is, just like the night at Frankie’s house. His hands are resting firmly on his thighs, muscles all bunched.

Clearly, it’ll be up to me to get this thing moving. So I unbutton my pants, opening them just enough to reach inside and adjust my dick.

Kyran’s eyes fling over to me, and he grows even stiffer. “What are you doing?”

“I’m gonna jerk off, Kyran,” I mumble, annoyed. “We have to do *something*. They won’t pay to watch us watching porn.”

His jaw ticks, but I can see him conceding to it as he reclines a bit, watching the girls fooling around on the screen. I’m not necessarily invested in this particular video, but I pretend I am, fisting my cock inside my pants and giving it a few leisurely tugs, hoping it’ll inspire him to do the same. But he’s just parked like a statue next to me.

Puffing out an impatient breath, I reach over to undo his pants for him.

He flinches away. “Back up, homo.”

“Dude… *seriously*. Loosen the fuck up, Jesus…” I go back to stroking myself. “You picked this dumbass video.”

“Would you rather it be two guys?” He snorts accusingly, to which I shrug.

“I don’t know… whatever. Doesn’t seem like your dick likes this one that much either…”

He glares at me, teeth visibly clenched as he reaches inside his pants. “I think it’s hot.”

“Really?” My head cocks tauntingly. He nods. “Well then, put up or shut up. Let’s see it.”

“No.”

“For fuck’s sake.” I yank my pants down, exposing a few inches of my dick.

It’s not fully hard yet, because his stubborn idiocy has me struggling to get wood. But when his eyes land on it and I witness him swallow, there’s a thump in my balls that pumps a little more rushing blood.

“You can just watch me if you want…” I hum in amusement, giving it some slow tugs.

He shakes his head and turns away, aiming his glare back on the screen as his hand moves gradually inside his pants.

The air around us is awkward as fuck, an uncomfortable sort of heat surrounding our stiff bodies on the couch. We’re both just watching the video and leisurely jerking ourselves off, though it seems obvious that neither of us is paying as much attention to the porn as we are to the strained mood we’re sharing.

The video ends and Kyran reaches forward, pressing play on the next thing that pops up. At first, it seems like just another video of two girls making out and rubbing each other’s pussies. But then a guy steps into the screen, presenting a large, erect dick for them both to suck on gleefully.

My eyes subtly slink to Kyran, watching as he loses available room inside his pants. He peeks at me for a second, cheeks flushing all pink while he squirms.

“You’re gonna have to take it out eventually.” I recline on the couch, jerking myself slowly.

His eyes drop to my dick briefly before coming up to mine. “Why? Because you’re desperate to get a peek?”

“No, but they are…” I nod toward the camera.

“Fuck you…” he breathes.

“Think of the money, Kyran…” I tug even more of my cock out.

He can’t seem to stop himself from looking at my dick, which is spreading a tight burn from my stomach up my chest.

“Don’t be boring,” I goad, humping up to my hand.

He bites his lip, checking the laptop again before he *finally* gives up and pulls his dick out, unrushed, like it’s supposed to be some big reveal.

To be honest, it kind of is. I really don’t want to give him the satisfaction at all, but even with only a few inches exposed, I can tell his dick is generous in size. His hand moves up and down on the shaft, skin sliding at the tip to expose a pink head.

My eyes widen. “You’re uncut?”

His face springs in my direction, blushed heat decorating him as he grumbles, “Yea. So?”

I shake my head to dampen my surprise. “Nothing, it’s just… I’ve never seen…”

My voice trails, and my eyes drop to the fascinating appendage, observing it.

Wow… Interesting.

“You look at a lot of dicks?” He calls me out, almost aggressively.

My gaze returns to his as mild embarrassment warms my cheeks. “No.”

His throat dips. Then he shoves his pants down another inch, revealing more of his cock. *Oh… kay. That is quite long… and thick.*

“I heard it’s more, like… sensitive,” I rasp, ignoring the fact that my own cock is growing harder and harder in my hand. “Is that true?”

“How would I know?” His words come out breathy. “I have no frame of reference…”

“Right…” I chuckle awkwardly, swallowing a mouthful of saliva.

I’m trying to focus on the video, but it’s nowhere near as captivating as what’s happening a couple feet away, and I hate it, but I can’t deny that watching his strong hand and shapely fingers sloping up and down is sort of hypnotizing me. The way the skin pulls back every time it goes down, exposing the shiny pink tip, is like…

Why am I so intrigued by his dick? I didn’t think I liked dick at all, especially not one attached to my jock asshole of a stepbrother.

But it isn’t until the video on the screen ends that I realize Kyran isn’t watching it either. He’s looking at my dick the same way I’m looking at his,

and it’s as confusing as it is electrifying.

I’m as hard as stone now, pumping into my fist at a steadier pace that I think he’s trying to match. We’re both struggling to keep our breaths in check, but it’s the only sound in the room and it starts to echo as they grow louder.

I don’t know how it happened, but the space between us has shrunk. I think I might be leaning in closer to him, and I don’t want to be, because if he notices, he’ll probably stop to yell at me.

Kyran’s head tips back on the couch, eyes closing as he works his cock in his hand. And I’m so busy gawking that I also don’t realize he’s leaning in closer… Until I feel his arm on mine.

“Just do it…” he whispers.

“Do what?” My voice comes out equally soft and throaty.

“We both know this is where it’s headed, so just…” He stops to swallow. “Just do it.”

His chest moves with unsteady flutters as he suddenly lets go of his cock, leaving it resting on his abs, waiting for attention.

I bite my lip. *I’m sure the fans would love to see me…*

I shake my head. “Only if you do it, too.”

His eyes snap open, and he peers at me. “Fuck that.”

“Then no dice.” I shrug, releasing my cock too. “This isn’t one-sided, superstar. All or nothing.”

His eyes are hooded, the gleam in them more furious than anything. But still, I think I see a tiny twinge of curiosity, as confirmed when he glances down at my dick.

Sucking in a breath, he mumbles, “This is just for the fans… right?” His eyes come back to mine, and I nod.

“For the fans.”

Reaching over hesitantly, he curls his fingers around my dick. And the sensation of contact, of his calloused hand on my sensitive flesh, prompts a tiny sound from within my throat.

“Don’t make that noise,” he growls, gripping my cock in a chokehold. He should know that it actually feels *awesome*, but I’m really trying to downplay it.

“I can’t… help it,” I croak. “Your hands are rough.”

“Shut up and let’s get this over with,” he hisses, moving his hand slowly up my shaft, then back down.

Oh God, fuck me, it feels really *fucking good.* I don't understand why… It's just a hand. A rough one, without any lube. In theory, it shouldn't feel good. But it does. It feels *awesome*.

Sliding my left hand beneath his arm, I grab his dick, and this time, *he* makes a noise.

"See?" I stroke slowly. "It feels—"

"No, it doesn't." His voice shivers through the words. "It's just because your hands are soft… Like a girl's."

"Whatever you say." I give his dick some gentle tugs, stuffing my fingers down into his pants to get it all.

Turns out only about half of it is exposed, which means it's even bigger than I thought it was. I'm not jealous, though… His is pretty much the same length as mine, except for his foreskin advantage.

The mutual jerking continues at a leisurely pace, and as much as I'm trying to fight it, his hand pulling uncoordinatedly on me feels exceptionally good. We're both leaned back, side-by-side, his eyes closed and jaw straining while I can't keep my wide gaze off what my hand is doing.

This is *insane*. I've never touched a dick that wasn't my own before. I can't believe I'm doing this, and what's more, I can't believe that I think just *doing* it is tightening up my balls even more than the feeling of him stroking me.

"Kyran…" I whisper, my eyes gliding up to his face where it rests, inches from mine.

"What?" He gasps, lips quivering when he speaks. His eyes are screwed shut, like he's desperately trying to imagine he's anywhere else.

"Does this feel good?" I hum, using my index and middle fingers to circle his tip and push the skin down.

"N-no…" he whimpers, then bites his lip.

My mouth is overflowing with saliva, pulse pounding in my skull while I blink at his face. "Do you want me to stop…?"

His hips lift ever-so-slightly, seeking out my hand as mine angle toward him, our thighs pressing together.

"Uhh… um…" He fumbles for words, the sounds of his panting lulling me into a trance.

"I won't…" I tell him, hoarsely, surrendering to the sensation of his timid strokes while I play with his cock in a way that he obviously likes but

refuses to admit it.

“Stop… t-talking, Avi…” he groans.

The way my name rolls off his tongue sounds different right now than any other time he’s said it. It’s softer, breathier, yes, but also with a gasp of lust. Like his tone is giving away more than his words ever would.

Something about it sparks a wild need inside me; a need to chase and capture it. To prove to him that he likes this, despite how much he’s fighting it.

“Harder,” I demand on a breath. And to my surprise, he obeys, stroking my dick harder, pulling it in his direction with my hips slanted toward him. Riding the high of him doing what I say, I rumble, “Move your pants down more.”

And he does. He uses his left hand to shove the waist down farther, wiggling himself free. Now both of our dicks are fully out, and I guess the curiosity is too much for him to ignore because his eyes creep open, his head tilting to peer down and watch his hand pump my cock.

When his lidded gaze slides back up to my face, it seems to accentuate how we are. And I can’t even help it. Like magnets, my eyes drop to his mouth, for just a split second. They pop back up quick, locking on darkened gold and green before falling once more to his moist and shivering lips.

Subtly has apparently flown right out the window.

“Don’t…” he growls.

“Don’t what?” I swipe my thumb over some slick wetness at the tip of his cock.

His chest shudders, and he groans, “Don’t even fucking think about it.”

I can taste the cinnamon from his breath, we’re so close. “What am I thinking about…?”

His face inches in closer, until our noses almost bump. “Do *not* fucking kiss me…”

It sounds like a threat, but the way his words are trembling, the way his entire body feels tense and coiled… it seems almost like a *dare*.

Like he wants me to defy him, in the way that only I do.

“Why would I kiss you?” My chest is heaving, eyes struggling to stay open from the confounding pleasure of him working my cock rough and fast in his fist.

“Just… d-dont,” he stutters on a breath. And then he whispers, so low I barely even hear it. “Please.”

It winds me the fuck up. I have no idea why… I don't understand it, but something about his soft, rumbly little plea has my balls drawn so taut, I'm ready to erupt. My hand matches the tempo of his, and his mine. Even going lefty, I'm somehow just lost in this drive, pumping him up and down while both of our hips chase the friction in tandem.

I'm dizzy, a fog of desire swallowing me up and controlling my movements as my right hand crosses over, sliding up his chest. He snarls in protest, but it turns into a needy hum as my fingers graze his throat, then his jaw.

And I hold his face still before mine, whispering over his hot mouth, "I don't have to."

For all the anger, resentment, and animosity he's been pushing forth up until now, I can *feel* him sloping into me, defying himself on purpose, and it drives me fucking crazy. My balls are throbbing, *aching* with the need to come, the burn of him jerking me wild, pulling me right up to the edge.

Kyran's fingers on his right hand graze my nuts, tickling them each time he goes down as his left hand flies to my shirt, gripping it in his fist. I can't tell if he's trying to push me away or pull me closer. I'm not even sure *he* knows, but the point is that we're practically on top of each other now, warring with the speed of voraciously beating each other off into a frenzy.

"You gonna come for me?" I gasp over his mouth, my fingers sliding aggressively into his hair.

He nods fast, but doesn't speak, biting back whimpers by chewing on his lower lip.

"Tell me…" I rasp, holding off my own orgasm because I don't want this to stop yet.

"Fuck off…" he breathes, then groans, lashes fluttering.

My hand slows. "Maybe I should stop then…"

"No, don't," he pleads. "I'm… I'm gonna…"

"Gonna what?" My fingers thread into his soft hair.

I'm fucking *gone* right now… Abandoned all rationale and everything I thought I knew before this moment. I'm seconds from coming apart in his rough hand, rocking into his heat and his stubborn need.

"I'm gonna… come," he croaks, hauling me closer by my shirt until I'm hovering over him, our hands bumping together in the furious chase. The swollen tips of our cocks brush and a shuddering cry brings hoarse words

from his lips. “*Fuck*… Fuck you, Avi… fuck you, I’m gonna fucking *come* for you.”

“*God*, I’m gonna fucking come,” I rumble, pressing my hips down so that our cocks are together and we’re fucking writhing and grinding them frantically. “Come with me.”

“I’m coming with you…” he whispers, then whines.

Then gasps. Then *groans* out the sexiest fucking noise my ears have ever heard as hot cum starts spilling out of him, all over me.

My hand, his hand, his dick, my dick. It’s shooting everywhere, soaking us and drawing out my own.

Head whirling off my body, my stomach clenches, and I lurch forward, biting down on his lower lip while my dick throbs and pulses cum all over us.

Our hips don’t stop moving, rippling into one another while we ride it out, coming fucking everywhere, our dicks slipping and sliding together. My fierce chewing on his lip turns to a sweet suction, foreheads together, heavy panting echoing off every surface of the room.

It’s completely fucking insane. The craziest, hottest, most unexpected thing that’s ever happened in the history of anything.

But it fizzles out quick, as it tends to.

As soon as the orgasm high has worn off, we’re not lost in the moment anymore. Reality whacks us both like a blunt object, and we realize what we’re doing. How far of a stretch this is from where we started only a few minutes earlier.

“Fuck…” Kyran grunts, releasing his grip on my shirt, and my dick, tumbling back on the couch to get away from me.

I clear my throat and back up too, shaking my head. Shaking off the daze.

Get up. Get up and shut off the camera.

Holy fuck, the camera.

Stumbling to my feet, I rush to turn it off before it records him freaking out and I have to edit him attacking me out of the video. Once it’s off, I let out a breath, yanking my pants up. There’s cum all over me. I would have no idea whose it even is.

That was… What the fuck??

That’s what it was. It was *what the fuck.*

“Um… You can,” I start, stopping to clear my throat because I’m way too raspy. “The bathroom is uh… there.” I somehow manage to point in its direction.

Kyran’s eyes are awfully wide for someone who just came in explosive fashion. But to my surprise, he doesn’t freak the fuck out, scream, or lunge at me. He simply nods and slinks off the couch, hauling his pants up as he staggers toward the bathroom.

He’s in there for a long time. More than fifteen minutes, while I’m cleaning up, making sure there’s no cum on the couch, which there definitely is. Just a little, and I manage to get to it with dish soap fast enough that hopefully it won’t leave an obvious stain.

By the time he eventually comes out, I’m sitting on the couch, with *Seinfeld* back on like nothing happened. Trying to pretend everything is normal… Like it’s just business, which is what we agreed.

Even though my stomach is flipping and flopping in a way that feels very unprofessional.

Across the room, Kyran is hovering, and when my eyes subtly peer in his direction, he looks completely put back together. No longer rumpled, hair brushed back into place.

“So I’m…” he starts, but his words get caught in his throat, and he gives up, stomping toward the door.

“I’ll text you about the...” But he’s gone before I can even sigh out the word, “Money.”

My face falls into my hands and I rub my eyes hard. “What the fuck, man??”

Glancing left, I find Robin, still curled up on the couch in the same spot. She’s been sitting there the whole damn time, which brings a laugh bubbling from within my throat.

“He’s my stepbrother, you know…” I tell her, and she blinks at me, unenthused.

My face slants toward the door, and I shake my head.

My fucking *stepbrother*… with whom I now share a very confusing, very complicated little secret.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

TheBlarneyBone: So peachy! I wanna lick ur ass..... then pummel that peach pie hole
MeatMan: Make me your chia pet and smear your seed all over me

Kyran

Distraction is something I've gotten very good at over the years.

A skill I learned to hone when I was just a kid. Enduring stuff that makes me uncomfortable while pretending I'm not is a bit of an art form for yours truly.

The key is forcing yourself to focus on other things. The more uncomfortable you are with the thing you're avoiding, the more you'll need to immerse yourself in the distraction.

I think that's why I've always been so good at school. It's not that I necessarily care about the subjects… Math, science, history… None of it is particularly *titillating* to me. But it's something to fixate on; something *else* to get lost in, like the dirt and the shovel used to bury the thing you don't want clawing its way to the surface.

The curriculum for undergrad business studies is pretty involved, and it's good. A lot of my teammates struggle to balance schoolwork and football, what with our rigorous training, game schedules, and how often we have to travel. But for them, sports and partying are their primary focuses, and for *me*… well, that's just not enough.

I fill in the gaps with my studies, because I have to.

Keep the mind distracted at all times. Never, ever stop to think. Because thinking is *bad*.

Thinking leads to remembering… And remembering is the enemy.

The way the light is hitting my books on the coffee table strikes an idea, for another one of my favorite distractions. And I pick up my phone, snapping a picture to post on Instagram.

Knowledge is the antidote to fear.

-Ralph Waldo Emerson

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Posted, I stare at the screen for a moment as likes start rolling in. My eyes flit to the top, and the notification for unread texts twists my gut.

Tossing my phone down on the table, I go back to my book. *Distraction.*

My eyes scan the words on the page, not retaining any of them as they all start to blur together. Because that's the thing about distraction… if the truth is powerful enough, it'll *always* manage to shove a hand up through the dirt.

"Harbor!" Guty shouts as he whips open the door with his arms full. "You've got mail, baby boy."

Kicking it shut behind him, he drops bags on the counter, making a ton of noise as he rustles through a bunch of stuff he apparently bought at the store. I can't help the grin that tugs at my lips while I sigh and stand up, stretching through the soreness from a vigorous morning workout, followed by sitting on the couch for way too long.

"What, did you buy the whole store?" I chuckle, walking over to see what he's doing.

"GNC was having a sale on that protein powder we like," he says, removing large tubs from the shopping bags. "We've got supplements, potassium chews… All the good stuff."

My brow cocks. "Did you buy any *actual* food?"

He grins and pulls out a giant pack of beef jerky.

I have to laugh. Guty is a freaking character. He's loud and crazy, and one of the best football players I've ever had the pleasure of playing alongside. He also can't sit still, ever, which is convenient for him because he's one of those guys who *loves* working out.

We're pretty much best friends, but we're also both insanely competitive, meaning when we work out together, we usually end up almost killing ourselves. His ongoing joke is that he has the best body on the team. *But that's never been proven.*

“You know you can’t *only* consume protein, right?” I smirk, and he beams one of his Colgate smiles at me.

“There’s kale salad in the mini fridge,” he mutters, tapping his finger on an envelope he dropped on the counter. “This is yours. It’s from the housing office.”

All traces of amusement fall from my face as I snatch up the envelope, holding my breath while I tear into it. I can feel Guty watching me, so I turn away to read what it says.

It’s a bill for next semester’s housing. *Eight thousand seven hundred and eighty-two dollars.*

For *five* fucking *months*.

This is America.

Closing my eyes, I remember to breathe, pulling in a long one and holding it as I scrape a palm over my face. I knew this was coming… I can’t be too shocked over it, but still. Seeing that number in print is pretty staggering.

The enclosed letter is full of stuff I already know, explaining the fact that my scholarship doesn’t cover housing. I’ll need to make my first payment by next month in order to stay in the Walsh residence hall. They offer a payment plan, which is still over two-grand a month. And that’s just to get me through sophomore year.

Junior year will come with a much bigger bill.

“Everything okay?” Guty asks, and my eyes snap open.

Folding up the letter, I stuff it into my back pocket, turning to face him with a smile that hides all my stress and uncertainty. It’s a good one. *I’ve had years of practice.* “Yup. Just confirming a few things from my grants. You get any of that muscle recovery stuff you were telling me about?” I change the subject quick.

His eyes narrow, as if he might suspect I’m hiding something. But thankfully, he doesn’t dwell on it. Just pulls a bunch of bananas out of the bag and grins. “You know it, Nueve. I’m gonna whip us up some shakes now. Get these guns poppin’! It’s game day, baby!”

He starts shimmying around the room, tossing stuff into his blender while I chuckle and shake my head. But it doesn’t take long for the smile to fade and the suffocation of reality to suck oxygen out of my lungs.

Those texts… I know I should probably read them. Strictly as they pertain to my current predicament. Avoidance only works if you have the

luxury of pushing away reality. And I don't.

I need more money. Like now.

The Venmo deposits I've gotten from Avi are working as a pretty decent silver lining to the crippling confusion and insecurity I've been ignoring since the night in his dorm. It's been a week since it happened, and I'm using every single measure of denial and distraction I possess not to think about what we did, hence why I haven't read any of his texts.

I don't need to know what he's saying… And I'd really prefer not to deal with him if I don't have to. But the fact is, that despite how awful the experience was, it did *exactly* what it was meant to…

I now have enough money for at least half of my housing bill for next semester, which is sort of unbelievable. Sure, recalling the haze of that night has bile crawling up my throat any time the memories get too strong for even *me* and my epic avoiding skills to subdue. But that's just because of what happened. It was so out of the realm of what I've ever done before… It threw me for an obvious loop.

I'm not interested in hooking up with guys. I don't want them touching my dick, or pressing their bodies against mine… Whispering things over my lips while they drag me into ridiculous, unwelcome spine-tingling orgasms.

That's not me. I'm not *gay*, no matter how much people online want me to act like I am.

And where my idiot stepbrother is concerned, well… I guess he was right, in a sense. Doing what we did definitely accomplished what we set out to do. It made us money. Unfortunately for me and my straightness, I need more. *Much* more, if I want to stay living on campus and thus preserve my football scholarship and my inevitable championship.

So here I am, wedged snugly between a rock and a gay place. And I just *know* Avi has been texting me all kinds of nonsense about how well the video did and how much the fans are now begging for more…

I feel like a reluctant sex worker who just accepted my first wad of dirty, shameful cash. I loathe the idea of being alone with Avi again, with that camera recording…

But at the same time, I know that he *was* right, and I despise it even more for that reason. This seems to be the only way to get the amount of money I need, as fast as I need it.

"You want this…"

Squeezing my eyes shut, I swallow down the saliva filling my mouth.

"It's okay to like it, you know…"

"Yo…" Guty's voice cuts into the hushed words in my head, and I flinch. "You alright?" He's staring at me with his forehead lined.

Straightening, I shove it all down, sliding the shiny plastic of my mask back into place.

"Yea, I'm good." The fake smile is so hard to hold sometimes, my entire body wants to collapse. "I'm just thinking about that Duke defense…"

Guty's look of concern transforms into a cocky grin. "Don't worry, amigo. Tonight, we're gonna exorcise those Blue Devils back to North Carolina where they belong."

He winks at me, and I chuckle. On the surface.

Underneath it is nothing but festering *doubt.*

"Alright, listen up! It's all lined up for us. We just need to focus."

Coach's voice rings loud over the roaring noise of the crowd.

"Gutierrez can break out of their hold, I know he can. But just in case, I want the rest of you gaining as much yardage as possible. They can try to cover you all, but it won't work." He aims a serious glare at me. "Harbor, sights on. Show 'em how high Eagles fly."

He slaps me on the back and I nod, with my mind both rushing like a waterfall and still as a pond. There's so much riding on this game, the adrenaline and nerves stiffening my muscles.

Bright lights, chaotic noise, all eyes on us. It's enough stress to crush you if you let it.

But I won't.

The sheer madness of everything somehow fades into the background, like there's a protective shield around me. It's my *control*; the discipline of my restraint. Harnessing every single bit of mayhem that surrounds me and using it as fuel.

I will not let them push me down.

I will not let them win.

“Drive!” Coach shouts as the seconds of our timeout tick down. “They’re expecting us to run, to take the obvious play for the field goal. Not happening. Fucking *drive*!” He backs up, then calls out fast in his usual commanding brogue, “Eagles on three. One, two, three—”

Everyone hollers, “*Eagles!”* Then we break.

And it’s back to the game.

Less than two minutes left on the clock and we’re down by three points. Duke came prepared. They’ve been matching our energy the entire game. Every time we score, they score, leaving our defense with their heads spinning each time the ball is in Duke’s hands. I’m confident that I can get us in the lead right now… But then my teammates will need to hold them off to run out the clock.

Losing this game is *not* a fucking option. Duke has been nearly unstoppable this season—*nearly* being the operative word. If we beat them now, we could clinch their spot in the playoffs.

Their quarterback, Devon Lancaster, is a powerhouse. We’re constantly compared to one another, our stats nearly identical. So for me, winning this game would finally put me on top for good.

I *need* this win. *I need to prove that I’m doing the right thing.*

On the field, I can almost feel the stands vibrating around me. Maroon and gold shimmer on the edges of my vision, as does the movement of a certain mascot I’ve been purposely ignoring all night.

Just knowing he’s over there has my hands clenching while I await the snap. He’s hopping around as the play clock counts down, and my jaw ticks.

Four… three… two…

Time stands still before it speeds back up in an instant. I’m fed the ball and I back-step, eyes zoned on Guty. They’re all over him, which has obviously been their tactic the whole game. To sever our connection.

But they’re playing it too close to the chest, leaving one of our other receivers, Tim Fellows, open to run. And he does.

He breaks away down the field, and I launch the ball in his direction. It’s an overshot… One that Guty would sail to easily, being the fastest dude I’ve ever seen. But Fellows has to sprint like his life depends on it to catch up to the ball.

I hold my breath, watching it fall as his arms stretch out. But I miss what happens when I’m tackled to the ground.

Scrambling out from under one of Duke's guards, I smack his hand away as he tries to help me up, jumping to my feet at the sounds of cheers and howls.

Fellows caught it. He caught the ball and is running, *diving* toward the end zone.

My heart is in my throat, breathing shallowed, as he narrowly avoids being grabbed and steps over the line before crashing to the ground.

"Fuck *yes!*" I roar, and the crowd goes wild as the ref calls it.

Touchdown!

We're all going crazy, Eagles players jumping and screaming to match the rumble in the stands. Everyone is freaking out, because it looks like we're gonna win this thing!

But there's still a minute on the clock. And the way Duke's been playing all night, I just *know* Lancaster is going to try for another touchdown while simultaneously running out the clock, so I don't have an opportunity to get back out on the field.

It's all riding on our defense, which means I can't control the situation. Like an itch just beneath the surface of my skin.

Theo nails the extra point, which is great, but it still doesn't placate me as I move off of the field, listening to Coach shout things at the linebackers. Slapping Fellows on the back, I grunt, "Nice job, kid."

He whips off his helmet, grinning to match my own. Excited, but also strained. Because we both know we're not out of the woods. "That how you always toss to Guty??" he teases breathlessly while squirting water into his mouth from his bottle. "Fuckin' Stretch Armstrong."

I laugh and give him a shove. "You pulled it off."

Removing my helmet, I hesitantly plop down on the bench, having some water as my eyes stay fixed on the field. My knee is bouncing while I watch Lancaster, trying to read him… Anticipate his next move.

But something distracts me. A large, dumbass form in my peripheral.

My teeth grind together, and I ignore it, even though I can *feel* him getting closer, coming right the fuck up to me while Duke's wide receiver catches the punt on their twenty-yard line. They set up into formation with fifty seconds on the clock, and it's the moment of truth.

There's the snap. Lancaster has the ball, but our guys are fucking *everywhere*. He ends up handing it off and they barely gain a half-yard.

"Fuck yea," I growl, my eyes darting right. "Get away from me, please."

“Hell of a throw,” Avi’s muffled voice comes from inside the eagle.

“Oh, was it?” I mutter, trying my best to disregard him and watch the game. Nerves are thrumming my stomach so hard, I feel like I could puke.

Come on, come on. We’ve got this.

“I’m guessing it was…” Avi sits down next to me, and I scoot away. “Since we scored points and all.”

My face tilts in his direction and I give him a look that’s part baffled and part mortified, to which he laughs. I mean, laughing as *Baldwin the Eagle*, slapping his mitts down on his knees and everything.

“I’m just kidding, Jesus…” he grumbles at the look on my face. “I understand football. I’m not a complete idiot.”

“Whatever.” I shake my head. “Just shut up. This is the most stressful moment of my life. I don’t want to listen to you blathering like a moron.”

“Rawr… *Sassy*,” he hums, and my fingers dig into the bench while I fight to ignore him, gaping from the sidelines at Duke’s third down, four yards to gain for the first.

“Come on, come on…” I’m whispering to myself over and over, reciting my prayers to the gods of football.

The play clock counts down, and I peek over to find Avi’s knee bouncing the same way mine is. I narrow my gaze at him, but his attention seems to be on the field now, too. As if maybe he *does* care just a little bit about the game…

A whistle blows, and my face snaps back to the field. The ball is in the air.

I jump to my feet. Lancaster just threw a deep one to his running back, number eighteen, down at our twenty-five-yard line.

The dude’s arms stretch out, and my stomach sinks.

The ball dances on his fingertips. My heart stops.

But then our cornerback, Matt Naruto, flies out of fucking nowhere, tackling the legs out from under Eighteen before he has a full grip.

And the ball is loose on the field.

A collective gasp rings out all around me, Eagles fans immediately bellowing in the stands. Of course flags are thrown, and now I can’t see shit. Everyone is diving all over the ball. It’s a mess.

When the ref finally stops the play, the ball is in our hands. And he calls it.

“Fumble! Recovery, Eagles.”

"*Yes!*" My arms fly into the air.

Avi jumps up and does the same, *everyone* around us fist pumping and cheering, celebrating getting the ball back with twenty-eight seconds left in the game.

We fucking won!

"We fucking *won*." I let out a breath as Avi grabs my shoulders and shakes me around.

"Yea, bitch!" he shouts, and I can't help but laugh.

"Harbor! Let's fucking win this thing." Coach shoves me out onto the field, all of us whooping and wailing and chuckling out of relief. *That was insane!*

I take the field, too far away to try for anything and risk it. So instead, we take a knee, and the game is over.

We fucking won. We beat Duke!

The crowd is going absolutely wild, as is our team. We're all jostling each other around, the testosterone really flying. This was a big one.

One more win and we're going to the playoffs.

"Hey, good game, man." Devon Lancaster comes over to shake my hand, and with a humble grin, I shake his right back.

"You, too."

Watching him wander off, I have to nod in respect. The dude is a class act. Not everyone loses so gracefully. I know he'll probably be sulking by himself tonight, overanalyzing every move and missed opportunity. I know, because that's what *I* do.

But on the field, you keep your head up.

I won't say I haven't cursed and thrown my helmet before. But I can't stand the guys who talk shit to the other team. It doesn't help, and it just makes you look like a baby.

Wading through all the bodies, I make my way back to the sidelines, and go figure, Avi comes up to me again, popping off the head of his costume.

"That was awesome, Ky." He grins.

Squirting water into my mouth, I swallow, then huff, "Thanks."

"Look, I kinda need to talk to you," he murmurs, low enough that I can just barely hear him over all the noise.

My muscles stiffen, eyes slinking in his direction. "Now is *really* not the time…"

“No, I know. But you haven’t read any of my texts.” He keeps pushing. “I just wanted to—”

“Don’t care,” I growl. “Go away, Avi.”

Turning from him, I freeze at the sight of Lexi galloping in our direction. *Oh God, here we go.*

“Babe! What a game!” she squeals, launching herself at me.

She jumps up into my arms, and like a reflex, I catch her. Her legs wrap around my waist and my eyes widen, startled by the way she’s acting like she’s my girlfriend. *I haven’t even seen her in weeks.*

Meanwhile, Avi is *staring* at us, brow arched as Lexi peppers my neck with kisses. And because I fully *hate* the knowing look on his obnoxious fucking face, I decide to grab her by the jaw and kiss her.

It’s for show, which feels obvious even to me, but it doesn’t stop Lexi from slipping her tongue into my mouth and really laying it on thick. I hear a few people murmuring around us, whooping for the quarterback and cheerleader making out after a big win like we’re in some kind of romantic comedy.

Peering behind Lexi while her lips move on mine, I catch Avi rolling his eyes, shaking his head as he stomps away. As soon as he’s out of sight, I pry my mouth from Lexi’s incessant suction, plopping her down on her feet while I shake it off.

She runs her hands up my chest. “You wanna come over and *celebrate*?”

My eyes flit once more in the direction the eagle just went. “I’m uh… I’m sort of tired.” I peek down to find her biting her lip.

“You know, I’m a pretty good masseuse…” Her eyes sparkle.

Sure, it would probably feel great… Fucking the hot girl silly after this win. Plus, it’s what I’m expected to do. It makes *sense*.

So I nod slowly and rumble, “I need to be with the team right now,” backing away from her touch. “Just for a bit. And then I’ll come by.”

She beams up at me. “Alright, sexy.” She pushes up onto her tippy toes to kiss my lips quick, whispering, “I’ll be waiting for you.”

I gulp and force a grin, using the opportunity to slink away from her, disappearing into the crowd of my teammates, who are all rowdy with the excitement of the win.

We trudge back into the locker room together while my thoughts whirl. I know it probably isn’t right to string Lexi along… I’m fully aware that I don’t have actual *feelings* for her. But then hooking up with fuckhot

cheerleaders is what we do. I'm sure it would relieve any lingering stress from the whole thing with Avi's and my secret… *job*, for lack of a better word, that doesn't make me want to stab myself in the brain.

But even so, while I'm showering in the locker room, I can't help how my mind drifts to my phone sitting in my locker. And the unread texts from my stepbrother.

Why am I thinking about this?? I just won a huge game. I should be celebrating by getting drunk with my teammates and letting big-titted cheerleaders rub me down… Not dwelling on the money I need to stay on the team and the shameful way I've chosen to drum up said funds.

Padding out of the shower with a towel around my waist, I linger in front of my locker while the rest of the guys are dressing quickly.

"Yo, you coming, Nueve?" Guty asks me, gathering up his things to leave with Theo and Naruto. "We've got some partying to do, pimpin'!"

They high-five one another, laughing and slapping each other's backs.

"Yea, totally." I grin at them. "I'm right behind you."

They leave, bringing the raucous noise with them until I'm standing alone in a quiet locker room with my curiosity piqued. *I just need to see…*

Get it over with. Read the texts so you can see what the fuck he wants and call it a day.

Unlocking my phone, I pull up the messages from Avi. He's been texting me for the last few days and I haven't even glanced at a single one. Until now.

Avi: I sent you some $$

Avi: Sent more.

Avi: Ok mucho dinero, superstar. It's really rolling in…

Avi: Just thought you might want to see some of the comments…

There's a picture attached; a screenshot of comments from his OnlyFans account. My blinking becomes rapid while I read them…

Miscellaneous strangers on the internet calling me *sexy* and *gorgeous* and *hot as fuck*. DMs from Avi's fans asking for more, offering even *more* money for *more* content… And my head is sort of spinning.

Avi: I don't need to tell you what this means…

Avi: I know you're ignoring me on purpose, but if you just think of this objectively… We could make enough for the next two years.

Avi: It's business, Kyran. Are you really going to throw away this opportunity because it's a little weird…?

My stomach twists into a knot. I hate that he's right. I hate that he feels like he knows all the answers, and I hate the idea of *money* controlling what I do.

But it's the unfortunate truth to my situation. If I want to keep going the way I am, with this team, winning and building my own legacy, something that belongs to *me*, then I need to buck up and swallow my trepidations.

Does it suck ass that my obnoxious stepbrother is behind the wheel of this thing? *Fuck yes, it does.* Because he's right… it definitely *is* weird. I don't want more things like what happened the other day in his dorm…

But *want* is a luxury that, like most other things, I just can't afford.

So with that thought and the image of even more Venmo deposits *cha-chinging* in my brain, I get dressed and leave the stadium.

But instead of going back to my dorm, I go to the Thomas More Apartments. Room 446.

Outside his door, my eyes shift up and down the hallway, making sure no one's around before I knock. I hear shuffling from inside, and when the door opens a crack, I'm met with grayish-blue eyes rippling with startled confusion.

I push my way past him inside.

"Yea, sure. Just come on in… Make yourself at home," Avi mutters sarcastically.

Spinning to face him, I grunt, "I'm following your advice, smartass." He raises a brow. "Looking at it objectively…"

Standing still in front of me for a moment, he blinks and visibly swallows before he says, "Okay. So… what next?"

I shrug, ignoring the gnawing uncertainty in my gut. "I guess… we get to work."

Avi lets out a breath that seems a bit unsteady, pulling a joint from behind his ear and lighting it. "For future reference, a little notice would be appreciated."

My head tilts at him. "Why? Do you have any *plans?* Other than smoking yourself stupid, I mean…"

"Maybe," he grumbles. "You don't know what I do with my time. What if I was gonna go out?"

He sucks in a long drag, blowing the pungent smoke in my direction. My face scrunches in displeasure as I wave it away. “Yea, well… I’m sacrificing my free time to be here, too. So get over it.”

“I feel so very special.” Sarcasm lines his tone as he pads around the kitchen.

Scanning him briefly, my eyes take in what he’s wearing… Gray sweatpants, a fitted black tank top, and a Yankees cap on backwards. At first glance, Avi kind of looks like a jock. I don’t want to pay him any compliments or anything, but he’s unexpectedly fit. I’ve never known him to work out, and he eats junk food like he’s afraid the wells of trans fats are going to dry up. Yet he’s all curves and slopes of defined muscle. A full sleeve of tattoos on his right arm and more scattered in other places…

Shaking it off, I push my worrisome thoughts to the back of my mind, watching as Avi stubs out his joint, then pours liquor into two solo cups. His nails are painted chipped black, some ink marks on his knuckles that prove he’s not, in fact, a jock, despite how he’s dressed and the way his body looks.

He’s a bizarre character… A nerd who’s not good at school. An emo kid who smiles all the time. An artist with more muscle than some of the dudes on my team.

He’s an aberration, and I think his haphazard personality is what makes me dislike him so much. More than the fact that he popped up out of nowhere and moved into my life like it’s just that easy, he’s almost *impossible* to pin down, and I hate that.

I want to be able to read people… to know what their intentions are. I like my humans transparent. And Avi is a murky mass of opaque complexities.

Stepping over, he hands me the cup. He lifts his to mine, and I give it an apathetic tap before slugging back the shot. The liquor warms my throat, burning its way down my esophagus and hopefully working quickly into my bloodstream to help fog up my awareness.

I might need to be blasted every time I set foot in this place… I don’t want to be cognizant of where this is going.

Reaching for the bottle, I pour myself some more, eyes sliding into the living room. The couch reminds me of us being on it last time I was here… *And my stepbrother’s hand curled around my—*

“Where’s the thing…?” My voice comes out rumbly, spouting words to distract myself from the hectic way my nerves are rattling. “The tripod or whatever…”

Avi is quiet for a moment, and when I peek at him, I find him watching me, curiously intent; the way someone might observe a dog they think could potentially bite them.

“In the bedroom,” he answers, slowly sipping from his cup.

Nodding, I force myself into reluctant motion, wandering in the direction of his bedroom. Unfortunately, being inside only ripples my anxiety more.

His room is a little bigger than mine, set up the same with two beds and two desks, though it’s obvious that only one of each are currently in use. Avi’s bed is all rumpled, with sheets and bedding strewn about, his clothing and belongings covering the opposite bed. I’m not surprised in the slightest by how messy he is, since we lived in the same house for years.

Thank God we never shared a bedroom. I’d probably off myself. Sharing a bathroom with him was enough of a headache. The way our sinks looked was like a portal between the real world and the bizarro world. Extreme cleanliness meets pure chaos.

Slinking into the room, I sneak a peek at the scattered papers all over his desk, drawings of people and faces and different scenes. The detail is sort of incredible, but I don’t want to dwell on it… Especially when I hear his bare footsteps entering the room behind me.

“So… no roommate?” I ask, sipping from my cup. “Like, at all?”

He wanders over to the tripod, fussing with a video camera. *That’s new.*.. The sight of it lurches my stomach up into my throat.

“Guess not…” He sighs and shrugs. “The dude never showed.”

“That’s… good.” My eyes flit to his. “I mean, for this. *Privacy*…”

Jesus, this is fucking awkward. Rubbing the back of my neck, I take a larger gulp of booze. *Please work faster.*..

Avi says nothing. He simply plops down on the bed, setting his cup on the floor as he reclines on his elbows. I’m annoyed by how he always seems so much more relaxed than I am. He’s perpetually unworried… and I can’t tell if it’s a symptom of his nonstop weed intake, or if he just genuinely doesn’t care about anything.

I end up shifting in place for a few heavy moments while Avi lies there fiddling with his nail polish like he has all the time in the world and none of

the concerns I'm wrestling with. Finally inching over, I take a seat on the bed by his feet, sucking down the rest of my booze.

"Is the nail polish part of your *anti-establishment* image or something?" I place my empty cup on the floor.

"If that makes you feel better," he huffs.

"I don't feel any type of way about it…" I grunt. "I'm just making conversation."

His eyes settle on mine. "Did you come over here to chat, or are we *working*?"

My jaw sets. "Forgive me for needing to build myself up to this… I'm not as interested in bisexual experimentation as you are, apparently."

"*God*, you're uptight." He drops his head back on the pillow with a breathy chuckle. "The more pressure you put on it, the weirder it's gonna be."

I glare at him. "Well, what the fuck do you suggest? Should I just fucking dive on top of you?? I'm not attracted to you, Avi."

His chin slopes as he aims a narrowed gaze at my face that brings unwanted heat rushing up my neck. *It must be the booze.*

"You're not?" His eyebrow arches, and I shake my head firmly. "Not even a *little*…?"

"No." My teeth grind together as he sits up.

Tugging his shirt over his head, he tosses it off to the side, and I can feel my pulse speeding up with my nerves. I fucking *despise* this reaction because it makes no sense.

I don't want to be nervous around him… I don't want him thinking it's because I *enjoy* doing this.

I don't.

"You must be a really good actor then." Avi's lips curve at the corner, into one of his stupid fucking dimples. "Ditch the football and you could be the next Jake Gyllenhaal."

Frustration tenses my muscles. "You're not making this any easier, asshole."

He leans in closer, dropping a hand over my hips until he's trapping me in place. I try to scoot away, but there's nowhere to go, and now my pulse is really pounding inside my skull.

"Whether or not we're faking this for the money, you can't deny that you got off, Kyran," he mumbles. "I was there. I saw it."

“That doesn’t mean anything…” I force myself not to focus on the heat suddenly baking me inside this bubble of tension, his cinnamon sugar breath, or his scent, like cloves, mild weed, and something familiar I can’t put my finger on.

I don’t *want* to put my finger on it. I just want to get through this as unscathed as possible so I can stay in school.

Focus. Think about the money.

He looks like he has a hundred more wise-ass remarks on the tip of his tongue, but he keeps them in, lifting his hand and slowly moving it up to the zipper on my hoodie. Our eyes meet and his brow lifts, subtly, as if he’s asking a question.

A question my mouth wants to shout a resounding *no* to, but instead my chin bobs in a small, uneasy nod.

He draws the zipper down, watching as it descends. Then he pushes the fabric off my shoulders, and as much as I don’t want to, I help him get it off. Sucking in a breath, I pull my t-shirt over my head before he can attempt to do it for me, because I *really* don’t want it to feel like he’s undressing me…

But then his index finger draws a line along my waist, where the band of my boxers is visible from beneath my joggers.

I snatch his wrist in my hand. “What do you think you’re doing?”

“I’m touching you, Kyran,” he hums, impatience framing his tone. Something about it causes an unwanted tickle in the pit of my stomach that makes me feel sick. “Do you not want me to?”

“No,” I growl. “I don’t.”

His head slants, and he blinks knowingly at me. “Then why are you here?”

My lips part, but I have no answer. There’s no way to do this without him touching me. It’s the unfortunate truth to this fucked-up situation.

So I swallow down even more unrest, release his wrist, and kick off my shoes, letting them clunk to the floor.

“You got here pretty fast after the game…” he croons, dropping a hand onto my thigh. My throat is all dry and scratchy. “I take it that kiss with Cheerleader Barbie didn’t go anywhere…?”

“W-why do you care?” I hate how the words stammer out of my desert-throat.

He shrugs subtly, that goddamn hand crawling toward my crotch. My heart is hammering, rattling my ribs as I sit, frozen, watching it like a venomous cobra. But it diverts its path, moving up to my abs, his fingers gently grazing my happy trail until I flinch.

"Just wondering…" His voice is a raspy whisper. The camera might not even pick it up. "If you already got off, or if this will be over much quicker."

"I'll be imagining I'm with her either way," I grunt.

The lie tastes sour on my tongue. In my mind, it's the truth. But it doesn't feel that way, and my stomach rolls. I feel like Avi can tell I'm lying, though I'm not sure how, but it's tripping me up even more.

"Fine." His fingers trace the lines of my abs. "Whatever you gotta do, superstar."

Suddenly, he grabs my forearm and flops backward, yanking me until he's lying on his back and I'm on top of him. I go to pull away, but he grips me tighter, moving my arm until my hand is on his chest.

"Go ahead." He settles beneath me. "*Pretend*."

"I… I can't…" I'm flustered to the max right now. I don't even know how to do this… *I don't think I can.*

My eyes slink to the camera, but Avi grasps my chin, twisting my face back. "Don't think about that. Just close your eyes and pretend I'm her."

"But you're *not*," I hiss, feeling flush in my face from how close we are… The position of my knees on either side of his thigh.

The fact that there's no pussy or tits in the general vicinity… Only a dick attached to my least favorite person in the world.

"Come on… You're *Kyran Harbor*." He smirks. "I thought you backed down from nothing."

He's right. I hate it, but he is.

I refuse to let this stupid fucking situation I'm in beat me down. *I've been fighting since I was a kid, and this is no different.*

Channeling my nerves into fuel, the same way I do on the field, I close my eyes and lower myself over him.

Shakily, my hand slides up his chest. It helps that his skin is smooth and warm, though all I feel beneath its surface are boulders of muscle, like my own. It's strange, and when our chests meet, I feel his tautness brushing mine in the most unexpected of sensations.

I've only ever felt tits on my chest. As curved as his pecs are, they're not tits, and I'm painfully aware of that fact as I seal us together. But I ignore it, grinding myself into him slowly.

I can feel him breathing, his heart rapping against my chest as I squeeze my eyes shut tighter and move my lips to his neck. They rest there for a moment, but when his Adam's apple dips in a hearty swallow, I have to move away, because it's too real.

He's too much of a *guy*, and it's too obvious for my brain to ignore. Taking on a new tactic when his head turns, I go for his earlobe, sucking it between my lips.

This is something I can do to pretend he's a girl…

But he lets out a rumbly sound, and I stiffen.

"Don't make that noise," I whisper sternly, flicking my tongue in his ear, sucking the lobe again until he squirms beneath me.

"I can't help it…" His hands glide onto my shoulders. "It feels good."

A twitch happens between my legs. I don't want it to, but it does, and it turns my stomach some more.

"I felt that…" Avi chuckles.

"Shut the fuck up," I growl and bite his ear.

Another twitch happens on my dick… But this one didn't come from me.

"You're so fucking gay." I press my hips down, and he breathes a ragged groan that stiffens my erection against my will.

"Say that with my cock in your mouth," he rumbles, giving my shoulders a gentle push.

Pulling back, I glare at him. "Not gonna happen. *Ever*."

"I think it will…" He bites his lip, eyes falling to my mouth. "For the right price."

"No." My stomach twists up like a pretzel, chills sheeting my flesh.

Despite how burning hot I seem to be, my nipples are bunched up and hard as stones, brushing on his, until I shudder. He smirks, fingers gliding up my neck into my hair while I scowl.

"They would *love* to see it, though, Ky." His tone is taunting, downright villainous, the grayish blue in his irises dark and glittering.

"I'm not sucking your dick, Avi." I gulp down the saliva filling my mouth. "End of discussion."

“What if we do it together?” His head slants, placating me with his bargaining.

I blink at him. “You mean like… you suck while I… suck?”

He nods. “That way it’s even.” One hand lifts and his fingertip grazes my lower lip. “And you won’t have time to worry about what your mouth is doing because you’ll be focused on how good it feels.”

I’m fucking rigid and my heart rate seems to be echoing its thumps all over my body… Even between my legs. I don’t know *why*… I have no earthly idea why my balls are humming and my dick is throbbing full and thick in my pants, but it’s happening.

Call it eagerness to be sucked, I guess. Because let’s be real here… Every dick just wants to be sucked, no matter by whom. I’m choosing to blame the fact that I’m even considering this on booze and my inherent male desire to blow my load into a mouth.

“I can feel you forcing yourself to fight against this, so let me just save you the trouble…” Avi moves his hands down, slipping his fingers into the waistband of my boxers.

Before I can even process it, he’s shoving them down, with my pants, until they’re below my ass, and my dick is out, resting on his stomach. I want to protest so badly, but my body isn’t responding. I’m just hovering over him, breathing heavily, with my cock flinching, filling and stretching before both of our eyes.

Distracting myself with words, I ask, “Have you ever… done it before?”

He shakes his head, pushing his own pants down. His dick is just as hard as mine, which I guess takes some of the humiliation away. “No… But I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t a little curious…”

“More than a little,” I croak. “That’s why this is all so easy for you… You’re just itching to add cock to the menu, aren’t you, *bro*?”

His hand wraps around both of our shafts, and I stifle a gasp. “At least I can be honest about it.”

“Ffuck… off…” I bite my lip to hide a groan at the sensation of his hand and his dick rubbing on mine.

“You can’t lie about what turns you on when your dick is out, Kyran,” he hums, stroking us together with leisurely pumps of his fist. “It’s stiff as fuck and leaking on me…”

This is too real…

My body jumps into fight-or-flight, and I jerk myself away from him. But I don't go far, rolling onto my side and raking my hand through my hair while I catch my breath. Avi slithers out of his pants, flipping around so that his face is in line with my dick and his dick is in my face.

"W-wait… Hold on," I rasp with my head reeling.

"Would it make you feel better if I started?" he asks, mildly sympathetic to my ongoing hesitation, but only a little. He mostly sounds like he wants to get this show on the road, which reminds me that it's just business.

So I nod, and he shoves my pants down farther, swooping them off my legs completely. And now we're both *naked*, in his bed together.

Naked stepbrothers… in a bed that's barely big enough for the two of us.

How is this my life right now??

But I have no time to protest or debate further, because a strong hand is curling around my hipbone, lips descending over the head of my dick.

"Ohh, *fuck*…" The words gust out before I can stop them, my eyes falling to Avi's upside-down mouth sucking on my cock.

Oh God… He's sucking… my… dick.

It's gentle, tentative, the way he sucks, like hasn't the slightest clue how to do what he's doing. But I guess the act is pretty self-explanatory, and he eases into it, sliding me deeper between his lips.

It feels absolutely *euphoric*, and I don't want it to. But the wires of my desire seem to be crossed because as much as I know this is something I've never allowed myself to want, I can't help but chase the slippery wet warmth of his tongue and the way he's groaning on my erection.

"*Fuck me*, that feels good." My eyes close, submitting instantly to the sensation, the tingle in my balls, and the captivating flutter of his tongue over my swollen tip as it frees itself between his plush lips.

Avi uses his grip on me to haul himself closer, and when I open my eyes, his dick is right in front of me with a shiny pearl of precum at its tip. Biting my lip, I stare as it leaks out, another one following it, and I can't stop my mind from swirling around the idea that it's happening because he's *really* enjoying himself.

The sucking stops, and he pulls his mouth away, breathing ragged breaths as he fists my cock, stroking it slowly. "This is feeling sort of one-sided, Ky."

"Sorry…" I mumble, working myself up to it.

His tongue flicks my crown as he jerks me, playing with the skin around it until my lashes flutter. Chills sheet my body, and I close my eyes, inching forward and opening my mouth.

“Kyran…” he whimpers, and my balls thump. “Suck me.”

The shivering groan that leaves my lips is replaced by the head of his cock as I lower onto him. *It’s business.… It’s just.…*

There’s something going on here… Something is *wrong* with me because having him in there sends a bolt of lightning zapping through my loins.

Avi grunts, then moans on my cock, sucking up, then popping off. “I like the way you taste…”

Fuck me. Fuck me fuck me fuck me, what is going on…?

Keeping my jaw open wide enough to fit him, I slide just a little deeper, groaning on his cock as he pumps it gradually in and out of my mouth. I’m not sucking much, but more than anything, I find myself hypnotized by the way his hips are working, spearing himself between my lips.

I press my hands onto his thighs, attempting to hold him back for fear that if he goes too deep, I’ll gag. I’m so fucking *nervous*, tight all over, muscles bunching in uncertainty and the delicious pleasure of him sucking on me like a fiend.

Avi’s mouth slurps off my dick, and he runs soft, moist lips down to my nuts, lapping at them over and over while he shivers. “God, Ky, that feels so fucking good… *Jesus*…”

Warmth blooms in the pit of my stomach, spreading a blaze inside me that makes no fucking sense. I don’t know what about the praise is clicking in some deep, dark corner of my mind, but it’s all I can think about. My hands cup his ass, and I pull him for more, sticking out my tongue and letting him ride it with gentle flicks of his hips until he’s so deep, his balls are in my face.

It doesn’t even register for minutes of him humping my mouth that I’m not gagging. I haven’t even gagged once, and his head is lurching deeper and deeper into my throat like it’s reaching for my tonsils.

Avi moves himself on top of me, kneeling over my shoulders and bracing himself on my thighs as he fucks down between my lips, using his to suck and suck and *suck* on my cock until I’m going cross-eyed.

I have no idea where I am anymore. I don’t know *who* I am… I couldn’t even tell you my name. I’m just sweating and burning alive, writhing

beneath a large, scorching hot body of muscle while far more inches than I can even comprehend rut into my mouth.

My saliva is gathering, and it has nowhere to go. I'm forced to swallow it, and when I do, my throat contracts around Avi's cock, causing him to shudder and groan.

I'm wound the fuck up, dizzy from the slow rough suction, like he's purposely trying to be as thorough as possible with my dick in his mouth. I think he's aiming to suck my orgasm out like a milkshake through a thin straw… which is exactly what's about to happen.

I wouldn't be able to hold it off if I tried. And to be honest, I'm really not… Because right now, I want nothing more than to fucking *come*.

Avi has his fingers around my nuts, massaging and squeezing them while he rides me at both ends, fucking me with his mouth and fucking my mouth with his cock. I barely even notice that I'm gripping his ass for dear life, clutching him while our bodies grind together, muscles tensed in anticipation of a sweet fucking release.

He smashes his hips against my face, feeding his big cock into my throat while I struggle to breathe.

Then he releases my dick, all wet and swollen as he whimpers, "Kyran… I'm gonna come. Fuck *yess*, I'm gonna… *come*."

Even if I wanted to, there's no moving away. I'm trapped beneath him. But the sickest part is that as soon as the words leave his lips, I'm waiting for it. Like it's my reward for doing well… *I want it.*

And I get it, in hot, thick spurts shooting all over my tongue.

The taste sets me off. I don't know why… *How* this is even possible, but the salty slick fluid being pumped into my throat launches me into immediate orgasm.

With Avi's mouth back on my cock, sucking me through sensual hums, I burst, feeding him heavy, *aching* pulses. Groaning and digging my fingers into his flesh, my world topples off its axis and goes spiraling out into the blackness of the universe.

"Mm… mmm mm *mmm*…" My unintelligible cries are muffled by the cock in my mouth, which is probably a good thing. I have no clue what I would be saying right now if I weren't obstructed, but I don't think I have control over my words.

Fuck… yes… come… come come coming, so… good…

Our movements slow, hips finally easing to a halt as we fizzle down from the high of a baffling, inexplicable mouthful of climax we both swallowed up like thirsty little cum sluts.

It was joint effort… A *shared* orgasmic experience.

And because of that, for a brief moment, I feel *connected*.

I'm not sure if it's to Avi, or maybe just the moment, but a mist of serenity has sheeted my body and my mind. And I'm settled.

Everything is gone… The uncertainty, the insecurity, the doubt. The terrible, awful pitch-black devastation I've lived with for so many years… it feels like it's all evaporated.

Like someone left the window open in my mind, and it all just flew away out into the open air.

Avi pulls himself off of me, severing the connection as he topples onto his side. I haul in a deep breath, suddenly much colder without the weight of him holding me down.

I'm… where…?

He flips around as my eyelids creep open, and the first thing I see is his face. Forehead lined in worry, periwinkle irises sparkling down at me.

Avi is never worried, or concerned…

He doesn't *care*… At least, that's what I'd thought.

"Ky…" he breathes, fingers trailing along my jaw while I just gawk at him like I've never actually seen him before. "Are you alright??" I blink, and his hand glides down to rest over my heart. "I'm sorry. I think I was like… suffocating you. I totally didn't mean to—"

My face inches up, upper body pushing me completely on its own, and I press my lips to his.

Who am I…?

This isn't me… This is someone else.

Avi is stiff, maybe shocked or surprised by what I'm doing, but only for a moment before his lips part over mine and he kisses me back.

Who are you…?

How…

He purrs on my mouth, touching his tongue to mine. And something snaps.

Reality slams back into focus. And I yank my face back.

"What the fuck…" I choke, fumbling away and clearing my throat. "No. No, no… Fuck that." Scrambling, I sit up fast and grab my clothes. "No,

this isn’t me.”

“Ky…” Avi sounds echoey as I stumble off the bed and jump into my pants as fast as my wobbly legs will allow. “Hey… wait.”

“Fuck off,” I snap, my voice still too breathy. I don’t sound like me…

Because this isn’t you, moron. That was someone else.

You don’t do things like that. You don’t like *things like that.*

I’m struggling to get redressed so quickly, I’m practically falling over. Lightheaded and confused… *I need to get the fuck out of here.*

“Kyran, will you just calm down for a second…” Avi grumbles, standing up and pulling on his sweatpants.

“Shut this fucking thing off!” I bark, gesturing to the camera while I pull my shirt on. “It’s over, Avi. It’s done. Shut it the fuck off.”

“Okay, okay,” he breathes, baffled in distress. It sounds bizarre to my ears, because he doesn’t usually sound like that. Like he cares… *Why does he suddenly care??* “It’s off, Jesus. Can you just chill for a second, please?”

My head shakes viciously as I slip my arms into my hoodie. “Nope. No need to chill. We got what we needed, and that’s all that matters.”

My jaw is straining, heart racing. I peek at him, and he cocks his head, like he doesn’t understand what I’m saying.

I roll my eyes. “It was an act, Avi. Business, remember?”

His eyes are wide as he gapes at me for a few heavy seconds of silence.

I don’t have time for this…

Turning away in a huff, I storm out of the room, heading for the door.

“Kyran, goddamnit, just wait a second!” he calls after me, and I force myself to stop.

Spinning to face him, we stare at each other, both sets of eyes rounded with varying emotions. I can tell he wants to say something and I’m pleading with all the cosmic forces I don’t believe in to just keep him quiet.

Eventually, his shoulders slump and he asks, “You good?”

Swallowing down the taste of him on my tongue, my scowl slips back into place. “Fucking wonderful.”

I’m out of his dorm in a flash, slamming the door a little too hard behind me.

I’m in control.

I’ve got this.

Everything is fucking fine.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

BigD1ck1978: I'll bend you over and show you the galaxy
TieMeUp69: @Backwardz_Cap I've never wanted a man to ride my face upside down as much as I want you to

Sub_way1010: PLEASE CHOKE THE LIFE OUT OF ME, I'LL SAY THANK YOU! xo

Sometimes I wonder what my life would have been like if he'd never died…

Growing up without a father isn't easy. But like most things, we adapt to it, and we move on. Human beings are built to persevere. We have the fascinating ability to come to terms with the drastic changes of life. We modify, alter, and adjust… We *live*, because that's what we're made to do. To keep going on until the wayward forces of the universe stop us in one way or another.

Ultimately, that's what life is. Living until you die.

That said, I often stop and think about how different things could have ended up if Arlo Vega hadn't fallen off that scaffolding. If his life hadn't come to an early end… Would I even be here right now?

I highly doubt it. I know there are forces at work, a path we're guided down, like one of this *Choose Your Own Adventure* books. Each step brings us in a new direction, to a divergent conclusion. And I'm sure that if I went back and somehow stopped my father from going to work that day, things would have turned out very differently.

We probably would have stayed in New York… Or maybe even moved to Madrid. My father has family there, and in Barcelona. I remember him talking about taking us when I was little…

But we never got the chance, and instead, because of this path, we ended up here. In Boston…

Where I'm currently in a good old-fashioned pickle of sexual turmoil with my own damn stepbrother.

As has become the standard, I haven't spoken to Kyran in many days, since the epic incident of sixty-nine that completely obliterated any and all questions as to whether or not I enjoy hooking up with dudes. I think at this point, it's safe to say that I'm fully bisexual… Because in all honesty, I did not hate having a dick in my mouth.

Didn't hate it one bit.

But of course, me discovering this new piece of the puzzle that is my sexuality isn't the cumbersome part. The snag lies in the fact that I had this revelation while going to town on the severely impressive dick of my asshole stepbrother, who, if I had to wager, is probably *not* joyously celebrating this newfound clarity the way I am.

Kyran is a complicated fellow. As much as I don't want to give him credit for being anything more than a preppy, privileged do-gooder with one of the best arms in the NCAA, Kyran Harbor is definitely deeper than what you see on his stoic, collegiate surface. He's got stuff going on, that much is clear.

And because of his shrouded composition, I can't tell if he's really just forcing himself through the things we've done together out of sheer desperation, or if a part of him is itching to figure out a new, hidden side of himself, the way I am.

I wasn't born yesterday. Kyran obviously enjoyed himself during both of our *collaborations*. Those two instances are the *only* times I can think of when I've gotten even the slightest glimpse into who he really is… When he's dropped his guard for just long enough to unwind that tightly coiled control and give in to impulse.

At the same time, though, a hand is just a hand… And a mouth is just a mouth. So maybe he *was* really pretending a girl was doing those things in order to get through it. For the *fans*. And more importantly, for their money.

My subscribers doubled after posting that video, and now the fans are utterly freaking rabid. They're foaming at the mouth for more of Kyran and

me, which is always a difficult subject to broach, since he has a tendency to disappear for days after we film, I'm guessing to rewire his robot brain and convince himself it never happened.

In Kyran's defense, he also had an away game in Miami the day after Thanksgiving, so that could be part of the reason why I haven't heard from him in two weeks. The Eagles kicked the crap out of the Hurricanes on Black Friday, and for all my claims that I only do the mascot thing as a joke—another way to annoy the crap out of my stepbrother—I'll admit, I watched the game. And I may or may not have jumped up and cheered a few times when said stepbrother threw some diesel touchdown passes. But you won't catch me *broadcasting* that.

Thanksgiving in the house was quietly tense, but it was still good to see Mom and spend some time with her. Although, the awkwardness piqued when she asked me what I've been doing for money, and I had to make up a part-time job on campus on the fly.

I told her I get paid to be the mascot, which is entirely untrue, and that I've also been working in one of the dining halls. Thankfully, she has too much on her own plate to be worrying about me right now, so simply assuring her that I'm *fine* and I'm *figuring it out* was enough to thwart the third degree.

I don't like lying to my mom, but what other choice do I have? I can't very well tell her that I'm slowly turning into a gay pornstar, and that my tuition money is coming from videos of me sucking orgasms out of her husband's son.

I can still feel his fingers digging into the flesh of my ass, the tightness of his throat squeezing my cock while he moaned and gasped on it… The flavor of him pouring pleasure into my mouth as our heated bodies trembled and shivered…

Jesus. I don't think anything has *ever* felt so good, which is a problem, because I'm really not supposed to be thinking about it that way. If it was any other dude on the planet, it wouldn't be so bad. But this is *Kyran* we're talking about…

We're only doing this to make money. Point blank.

But then… he kissed me.

Naturally, he snapped out of it fast and stormed away, which is more on brand for the Kyran we all know and dislike. But I can't shake the feeling of his lips…

They're so soft.

Okay, stop it, brain. Stop thinking about him and move on with your life.

I have one more class for the day and then it's the weekend. It's a bi-week, so there's no football tonight, and I'm all geared up to spend the evening smoking some grade-A kush, ordering Chinese takeout, and maybe drawing for a while before I inevitably find myself curled up on the couch again with Robin, watching Netflix in my underwear.

The perfect introvert's Friday night.

A couple of hours later, I run into Frankie while cutting through the quad after class. I haven't seen her since last weekend when I met up with the crew at her apartment, where we all adjourned to her living room floor for weed and Rosé, classy bitches that we are.

"Where are you headed off to next?" she asks while we stroll, arm-in-arm, toward the Green Line.

"I have an epic night planned," I tell her with a grin. "I'm gonna smoke myself stupid and binge-watch serial killer documentaries with my hand in my pants."

Frankie snorts. "As awesome, and completely un-sad as that sounds, cancel it. You're coming to a party with us instead."

My lips slope into a frown. "Party? That would require me putting on actual clothes and engaging with humans." I shake my head. "No, no. Too much effort. Sorry, love."

She gives me a hard yank on the arm. "Stop being a hermit. Let fun Avi out of his cage for the night!"

"But… it's so cold," I whine and pout.

"Come on, dude." She rolls her eyes. "We all know how wild you are… ***Backwardz_Cap***." I narrow my gaze at her, and she smirks wickedly. "Or is that side of you only reserved for stepbrother sexy times now?"

"Shhh!" My eyes widen and flick all around us. There's nobody nearby, but still.

Frankie laughs. "Seriously, man. I *still* can't believe you got him to do that stuff. Muy caliente." She fans herself.

"Why are you watching my videos??" I snap quietly.

"Uh, because they're hot as fuck," she replies casually. "I'm not even ashamed to say that last one got me all kinds of moist."

"You're being gross," I grumble petulantly, shoving her toward the station. "And to think I offered to chivalrously walk you to your train. I say

good day!”

Twirling away from her, I take a tentative step before she grabs me by my coat.

“You’re coming to this party tonight, Aviel,” she insists in that Frankie tone that means I have zero choice in the matter.

A scoff turns to a sigh as I mutter, “Where even is it?? I’m not going all the way down to the Hammond Street dorms…”

“Well, you’re in luck, darling,” she chirps. “It’s right up by you. In Walsh.”

I squint at her. “Whose party is it exactly?”

She pauses for a moment before she answers, “Theo Reeves.”

“Oh, hell no.” I shake my head. “Absolutely not.”

“Whyyy?” She pouts.

“Because he’s the Eagles kicker! He’s one of Kyran’s best friends, and it’ll be in Kyran’s *building*. There’s no way… I will not invite disaster like that.”

Frankie tugs my sleeve over and over. “But it’ll be fun! We’re all going.”

“Don’t care.” I stand firm in my decision. “I’m not going to a party with a bunch of football players, aka my stepbrother’s friends, to watch them do keg stands and make out with girls.”

She shoots me a knowing sneer of a look. “So *that’s* why you don’t want to go… Because you’re afraid your secret hook-up buddy will be there with his cheerleader girlfriend…”

“Okay, first of all, she’s not his girlfriend.” My jaw clenches while Frankie tilts her head and smirks. “Second of all, I don’t care… And third of all…” My voice trails off in my state of fluster. “Whatever. It doesn’t matter… I’m just not going. And why the hell would you guys want to go to their party anyway?? Football players are beyond lame.”

“Bea wants to hook up with Theo.” Frankie shrugs.

Huffing, I rub my eyes. Bea has been crushing on Theo since last year. They make out on occasion, sort of casually, but I know Bea, wily little thing that she is, is itching to get him naked. I can’t say I don’t get it… Theo is pretty hot.

But that’s off topic. And how come the only guys I’m registering as hot *are football players??*

My thoughts are spiraling. The point is that I do *not* want to intentionally put myself in the same shared space with Kyran, especially after what we've done together.

Us *alone* is dangerous… With people around? It's a recipe for destruction.

"You can't avoid him forever, Avi," Frankie's voice chimes into my obsessing. "You go to the same school. If you guys are going to keep up this clandestine side-hustle, you'll need to learn how to coexist without it being awkward." She nudges me while I consider her words. "I mean, think about your next family gathering! Aren't you both going home for Christmas?"

Ugh… fuck me. I hadn't even thought of that.

I guess I was gifted Thanksgiving dinner without Kyran. Who knows what it would have been like if he was there…

Frankie has a point, which irritates me. *Gorging myself on Chinese food and watching TV would be so much less involved…*

"Alright, *fine*…" I mumble, and she jumps around in celebration. "I'll *consider* it! No promises…"

"Lovely." Frankie kisses me on the cheek, immediately darting away toward the train. But she peeks over her shoulder to call out, "Make sure you look hot! Gotta impress your secret boyfriend…" She winks, and I'm seething.

"I don't fucking—" I shout after her, but she's already gone as I sigh the word, "care."

It's true. I *don't* care about impressing Kyran, and I know she's just fucking with me. But for some reason, my nerves are swinging inside me. And my hands are sweating.

Biting my lip, I turn and stalk back in the direction of my dorm.

God, what the fuck am I gonna wear??

This is a bad idea.

That fact hasn't changed throughout the entire course of the last few hours, while I was smoking, and showering, and smoking and getting

dressed, and smoking again while standing in front of the mirror, assessing my choice of wardrobe.

I settled on my favorite black boots, ripped black jeans, and a red-and-black flannel button-down. My hair is mussed up, just the way I like it, and my nails are freshly painted, the standard black I always use.

Except that *now,* all I can think of is Kyran's comment the last time I saw him.

I really don't care that he noticed it… I've been painting my nails black for years. But now that he said something, I can't stop hearing his words every time I look at them.

My anti-establishment image… *Pfft. What a sheep.*

Although, I guess maybe that is why I started doing it…

Goddamn him. He ruins everything.

He even somehow managed to ruin my first bisexual experience. Now, *every time* I think about fooling around with a guy, I'll see his stupid face.

Bleh.

I'm in a mood as I take the stairs up to Theo's floor of the Walsh Residence Hall. As soon as I'm in the hallway, I hear music and voices, which amps up my jittering even more. I hate coming to parties on my own. *I knew I should have called Zeb or Micah to see if I could meet up with them and go together.*

I made sure to arrive fashionably late, because as much as I dislike parties like this, showing up before everyone is loosey goosey sounds a million times worse. Meandering up to the door, I peer into the party. Right away, I spot Bea talking to Theo, and I decide to buck up and go say *hi*.

Wandering inside to the thumping bass and smooth melody of Two Feet, I keep my head down, ignoring the *he doesn't belong here* gazes sticking on me like static cling. I avoid making eye contact and head straight for Bea. But an arm grabs me before I can get to her.

"Hey, girl, heyy!" Zeb kisses me on both cheeks like we're somewhere in Europe.

"Look who made it!" Micah cheers.

"Sup…" I mumble, forcing my eyes not to travel around in search of my stepbrother.

"*Ooh*… someone's not fucked up enough." Zeb pouts. "Here. Take this."

He hands me his cup. I sniff it and wince. "Jesus… What is this??"

“It’s my signature cocktail.” He grins. “I call it the *Sex With Zeb On the Beach*.”

“My mom told me not to accept drinks from strangers,” I chuckle, then take a large gulp from the cup. “Hopefully these roofies kick in quick.”

“Amen, sister,” Zeb sneers. “Can’t wait to have my filthy way with you.” He winks, and I give him a look.

“This drink, like the idea of sex with you, is completely disgusting,” I tease, and he feigns outrage. “Where’s Frankie?”

Sipping the drink again, I look around, already feeling warmed up, partially from the booze, but also from the comfort of having my friends around. They always help to improve my mood. I don’t feel like any less of an outcast, but when I’m with them, we’re all outcasts *together*.

“Believe it or not, she’s chatting up your all-star quarterback stepbrother.” Micah nods across the room.

My spine stiffens, and my pulse instantly speeds back up when I spot them over on the couch. Frankie is talking to Kyran, who’s smiling pleasantly, laughing at whatever outrageous thing I’m sure she’s saying.

A strange knot forms in my stomach while I watch them… The way Kyran is leaned back and sort of relaxed. Frankie’s hand on his knee.

Are they… flirting??

There’s no way… Kyran is not Frankie’s type at all, and she’s definitely *not his type either.*

But then my mind flicks through images of them making out, her stroking his dick and him licking her pussy… During our haphazard attempt at a threesome, which led us down this confusing and complicated path that we’re now on.

So I guess Kyran was just into her *that night…*

Hm.

Slugging back the rest of the gasoline that is Zeb’s drink, I cough and shove the cup at him. “Make me another one, please.”

Zeb lights up, but I can barely focus on it. I’m too busy watching Frankie trail her long, sparkly nails along my stepbrother’s shoulder.

“I think they hooked up,” Micah says, and my face whips in his direction.

“*What??*”

“Yea… At her Halloween party,” he goes on, and my shoulders drop back along with my perplexing dread.

“Oh…” My eyes nonchalantly swoop back over to them.

“I saw him leaving her bedroom that night, and then he bounced right after.”

I peer at Micah. *Well, I guess he didn’t see me also emerging from said bedroom, so I guess that’s a good thing.*

“I thought he was dating that cheerleader girl.” Micah sips from his cup. “Lexi something…”

“They’re not together,” I blurt out, and he cocks an eyebrow at me. “I mean, like *officially*. I don’t think…”

What the hell is wrong with me??

And where the hell is Zeb with that drink?

A moment later, Zeb traipses over with his arm extended to hand me the cup. “I made you a double.”

Snatching it, I drink it fast, ignoring the severe burn.

“Actually, maybe more of a triple…” he hums. “Go easy, hot stuff. There are like five different kinds of booze in there.”

“Mhm…” I mutter, tuning him out as my focus draws back to Kyran and Frankie like it’s magnetized.

Frankie looks up and spots me, grinning deviously as she waves me over. I shake my head at her, but she narrows her gaze, giving me one of her insistent looks. Ignoring my better judgement, I mumble to Micah and Zeb that I’ll *be right back*, making my way across the room while trying to move as casually as possible.

Kyran doesn’t notice me until I’m standing right in front of him. But when he does, his face drops and even pales a little, like he’s just seen a ghost whose cum he swallowed.

“Bae!” Frankie squeals, grabbing my hand and yanking me until I stumble down onto the couch. And because she’s pure evil, she moves over just in time so that I end up wedged between her and Kyran. “Bae’s here!”

Kyran scoots away from me, clearing his throat and gazing into his cup. I peek at him, our eyes locking for a split second before he goes back to searching his drink for an escape from this awkward situation.

“Hey…” I grumble to Kyran while I lean away from him, into Frankie’s side. My eyebrow arches suspiciously at her. “What’s going on, bestie?”

“Oh, nothing,” she sings, resting her head on my shoulder. “We were just chatting.”

“About what?” I ask her in a hushed growl. She smirks and winks at me, but doesn’t answer.

This girl is testing me today.

“What are you doing here, Avi?” Kyran grunts from my right, and I turn to face him.

He’s showing off his typical scowl. Because clearly awkwardness is nothing compared to his distaste for my presence.

“Well, Kyran, judging by all the people, booze, and music, I’m gonna say… I’m here to do everyone’s taxes.” I roll my eyes and sip my drink while Frankie giggles.

“Listen, smartass,” he hisses, not amused in the slightest by my wit. “There are a million other parties you could go to. You don’t need to come to the ones hosted by *my* friends.”

I scoff. “Don’t be such a whiny douche. My friends are here, too. My friends are *canoodling* with your friends.” I gesture to Bea and Theo, who are visibly flirting a few feet away. “So why don’t you just chill out, hm?”

“If you tell me to *chill out* one more time…” Kyran snarls, inching in closer like a rabid wolf about to pounce.

“This is exactly what I was waiting for,” Frankie hums, and we both glare at her. She’s grinning wickedly, watching us with wide, sparkling eyes and extreme interest.

“Whatever.” I stand up, tugging Frankie with me by her arm. “I don’t need to sit here and listen to your pity party. The *actual* party is much more fun.”

Dragging Frankie away, I swallow the rest of what’s in my cup, my neck and face all hot from the booze and the frustration Kyran carries around with him like an airborne toxin. I can definitely feel the effects of the drinks making me a little swimmy, but I push past it and march over to Zeb, demanding another one of his lethal cocktails.

I’m gonna need it with Grouchy McAsshole over there glaring at me all night.

“Why were you sitting with him??” I ask Frankie in a hushed, accusatory tone. “You know he hates me, and any time we’re within a few feet of each other, it’s the opposite of a good time.”

“Oh, you mean like the *terrible* times you guys have recorded for your OnlyFans?” She slants her head, wearing a knowing smirk.

My eyes widen and bounce around to make sure no one heard. Which, once again, they didn't.

Frankie rolls her eyes. "Okay, Avi, now *you* need to chill out. I was just *talking* to him. And cards on the table, I was hoping you'd show up and bring that smoldering tension you two can't help but make together." She nudges me and leans in to whisper in my ear, "Maybe it'll help drum up some more spicy content for later."

My jaw clenches. "You're meddling, Frances. Leave it alone."

She shrugs unapologetically, spinning to talk to Micah. And my eyes slide back over to the couch. But Kyran is gone.

Letting out a breath of relief, and maybe something else I don't care to analyze, I accept yet another drink from Zeb, and the four of us get to partying, which is what I came here for, despite what my jerk of a stepbrother thinks.

The night surges on. People are getting pretty drunk, shouting and laughing, dancing and hooking up. I finally get to see Bea for a few, and of course she has to tell me all about how she touched Theo's dick earlier and how she *just knows* it's big and beautiful.

I'm trying to pace myself with the drinking, but I can't help it. Kyran is across the room all night, fucking around with his football friends and shooting me the occasional death-glare. It's annoying because I thought I'd gotten over his assholish ways. But ever since we started recording things together, it's like his mood is affecting me more than I want it to, and it's pissing me off.

Kyran's roommate, Guty, gets into the middle of the room and starts breakdancing, which is as hilarious as it is awesome. We're all cackling and cheering for him as Zeb pokes me in the side.

"That dude is so fucking hot," he whispers to me, and I curl my neck to drunkenly gawk at him. "What?? He is…"

"He's also like… the straightest straight guy ever invented." I chuckle, watching Guty move.

Zeb shrugs. "Challenge accepted."

Rolling my eyes, I huff at his nonsense, my gaze traveling over the crowd of people swaying and moving to the music. It stops short when I see Lexi Erikson, Kyran's cheerleader *pal*, with her hands running up his chest. She's whispering something in his ear, and he kind of looks bored. But still, his hand is resting on her waist while she kisses his jaw.

Then his eyes lock on mine. Bringing my cup to my lips, I use it to distract myself and try to remain indifferent. But I can't seem to break the staring contest. And now Lexi is licking his ear… sucking on his earlobe.

Like he did to me. In secret.

My eyebrow quirks at him, the subtlest of unintentional smirks gracing my lips. And his eyes fill with visible rage. He grabs Lexi by the face and kisses her, rough and deep. Almost aggressively, making out with the blonde bimbo like he's digging for gold in her mouth with his tongue.

I mean, really… does he even want to kiss her?? What is he trying to accomplish right now??

I keep watching him, and his eyes creep open, settling on mine once more while his lips move audaciously with Lexi's.

Okay… dramatic much?

We get it, you like girls. Who doesn't??

I'm getting sort of fed up with this party, and the anxiety this whole stupid experience seems to be breeding inside me for no fucking reason. Turning away, I spot Bea on Theo's shoulders while he gallops around the room like a horse. Weaving through the bodies, I stagger over to them.

"Babe, I might take off…" I tell Bea as she rips a shot from a bottle of Fireball.

"No! Don't leave yet!" she whines.

"Yea, bro!" Theo slurs. "It's *so* early."

"It's really not that early…" I mutter, pulling a joint and my lighter from my shirt pocket.

"Oooh, good idea!" Bea hops off Theo's back. "Let's toke toke." She turns and bats her eyelashes at him. "Can we *please* smoke in your bathroom, sex muffin?"

Theo looks like he wants to protest, but Bea's really laying it on thick, dragging her nails over his abs through his shirt.

He purses his lips. "Fine. But blow the smoke into some toilet paper or something." Bea squeals and kisses his cheek, grabbing me by the arm. "And use a shit-ton of Febreze!"

"This ain't my first rodeo, cowboy!" I call out to him and wink as Bea drags me toward the bathroom.

"Excuse me, thank youuu," she hums, throwing herself in front of people who were waiting for the bathroom, shoving me inside and closing the door behind us.

Laughing, I light up the joint, pulling in a long drag before handing it to her.

I grab an empty toilet paper roll and stuff it with toilet paper for a makeshift vaporizer, blowing the smoke into it while Bea showers us in Febreze.

“Isn’t Theo so fucking hot??” She spins in circles.

I try to scoff, but it comes out more like an actual laugh. “How would I know…”

“Avi, come *on*,” she mumbles, waving away the excess smoke. “We both know you’re dabbling in dudes.”

I freeze. “Says who…?”

“Says me.” She grins, and I relax a little. “And you. Because you told me and Frankie you thought that guy in the movie we watched the other day was *sexy*.”

My brows zip together while I struggle to recall what she’s talking about. *Man, I really need to stop talking to people when I’m drunk and high…*

“Oh, you mean Tangerine from *Bullet Train*??” She giggles and nods. “Objectively. I said *objectively*… I liked his accent.” I swallow. “And his mustache…”

Bea pouts and pinches my cheeks. “You’re so stinkin’ cute.”

“Get off me.” I brush her away while she laughs.

“Hey, you know me.” She plucks the joint from between my fingers. “I don’t discriminate against genitalia.” She beams, and I cackle. “As long as someone’s hot, I’ll be a THOT!”

We’re both laughing like idiots as she twerks in front of me chanting, *“THOT THOT THOT.”* Until suddenly the door is swinging open, and we’re met with the perpetual scowl of my super-fun stepbrother.

“Can you not fucking fishbowl the bathroom??” he growls, only at me. Not Bea.

Just me. It’s always my fault.

“Don’t be a party pooper, bro.” I giggle while Bea covers her mouth to hold in the laughter. “Take a hit of this sweet gange.” I hold up the joint and he smacks it out of my hand, stomping it out on the floor. “Yo, not cool.” I frown. “Party foul.”

“What the fuck are you doing in here??” He keeps coming at me with his signature brand of hostility, and I back up.

“Partying.” I wink at Bea, who bites her lip.

Kyran’s angry eyes flit between the two of us. “Are you two hooking up?”

“*What?!*” I snort.

He steps into the room, crowding me with his fists clenched. “Well… are you? Because my friend likes this girl, and I think it would be pretty fucked up if you were in here trying to steal her.”

“Okay, you sound mucho loco right now.” I chuckle at him. “I mean, *yes*, we’ve hooked up a little before, but we’re not—”

“Bea, please back away,” Kyran seethes with his glare stuck on me. “I’m gonna waste this loser and I don’t want you to get hurt.”

“Kyran, nothing was happening,” Bea sighs, still laughing a little, although Kyran is clearly not amused, and I’m sort of starting to worry myself that he’s about to hit me.

“You need to leave,” Kyran says to me with his eyes narrowed and his jaw ticking. “I’ve had enough of your stoner bullshit.”

I peek at Bea, who’s finally starting to look a little concerned. And because I want zero drama, especially within the football player crowd, I shoot her a forced smirk.

“Bea, it’s okay.” I wave a hand at her. “Everything’s fine. Stepbro just needs a minute to cool off.”

She blinks at me while Kyran is backing me up against the sink. “Are you sure?”

I nod fast. “Totally. Go get us some drinks. I’ll be right there.”

Bea shrugs and flits away, closing the door behind her. Leaving me with the snarling beast of suffocatingly wound frustration also known as my stepbrother.

“I literally want to kill you,” he hisses in my face. I place a hand on his chest to keep him back, and he smacks it away. “*Seriously*… Just seeing your fucking face makes me want to bash it in.”

“Don’t do that,” I mumble with my heart pounding louder than the thumping bass of the music.

“Why not? I *want* to…” Kyran grabs me by the throat as his body wedges mine between him and the sink. “Why shouldn’t I get what I want??”

He’s pressing into me so hard, my ass is resting on the counter while my upper back connects with the mirror behind me. Attempting to shift away

from his rage, I move left. But he slams me against the wall, the wide plane of his chest moving up and down with heavy breaths.

“You’re acting like a fucking crazy person, Kyran.” I stand my ground, hands on his chest trying to shove him away. “Just because we—”

“Not another fucking word about that!” he barks. Both of our jagged breathing frames his voice, ringing through the confined space.

“We haven’t spoken a word about it yet!” I snap. “You’re the one being a psycho. *Why?* Because you liked it?? No one fucking cares!”

Kyran presses himself into me, and I’m sweating all over. His body is a million degrees. Probably because he’s about to Hulk himself out of his clothes, but it also seems like the heat is happening because of how close we are.

And how our dicks are touching…

“I hate you.” His voice reverberates into me.

With my hands on his chest, I feel how fast his heart is racing. It causes me to swallow, which he must feel since he’s currently holding my throat like he’s about to choke me to death. His eyes briefly drop to where his hand is, then glide their way up slowly over my lips, back to my eyes. His pupils dilate.

Okay… what’s going on?

Why is it so hot in here??

Something weird happens to my hands… They lightly grip his chest, my fingers curling around the material of his shirt. He gulps visibly, and his breathing shallows.

“Why do you hate me, Ky…?” I ask on a hoarse whisper.

“Because,” he growls, still plastering me to the wall with his body.

“Because *why*?”

I tug him by his shirt, and he comes with my pull, inching closer, lips hovering over mine until I can taste the fruity booze on his breath.

“Because…” He gulps again, glittering green and gold falling curiously once more to my mouth. “*Because* you’re… you’re…”

“You don’t know why, do you?” My back arches, and our chests bump, bodies sealing together.

He doesn’t look anywhere near as angry anymore. It’s still there, but more than anything, now he’s a baffled, helpless shivering frame. I don’t know what the hell is going on between us, but every single muscle in my body is bunched up and my blood is rushing in my ears.

There’s some force holding us together, and I don’t think I’m strong enough to fight it. Maybe neither is he…

So against all rational thinking, my lips brush over his. I don’t even think I did it… *Why would I do that? It’s suicide.* But it happened, and it prompts a little noise from within Kyran’s throat.

“Avi…” He says my name on a trembly breath. “Don’t…”

My head is clouded up with lust as I whisper, “Don’t say *don’t* when you really mean *do*…” And my lips part over his.

The way the plump bottom one fits snugly in between mine… like a perfect, plush puzzle piece. I can’t even help but give it a gentle, hesitant suck. *You know… since it’s right there.* And he purrs.

He fucking *purrs*. The hot, grouchy blonde.

My *stepbrother*.

That noise, Jesus Christ…

My dick jumps as Kyran’s grip around my throat loosens, his hand timidly falling down to rest on my chest while mine use his shirt to haul him in *closer*. And kiss him, just a little more…

Because I can’t *not*.

The literal second it becomes apparent that we’re actually kissing, it turns feral. Zero to a hundred. In the blink of an eye, our lips are no longer softly grazing, they’re ravenously *attacking*. Sucking hard, parting wider so our tongues can play. It’s fucking vicious and greedy and *oh-so hot*.

Kyran groans quietly and I groan back, my fingers releasing his shirt to slide up into his hair. He presses me into the wall harder, but I press back, fighting him for control, which he seems to give up easily for me, slipping under the spell of these intoxicating kisses.

I bite his lip and he whines, squeezing my chest, touching me with twitching fingers as the sounds of wet suction fill the small room.

“Close the door,” he whimpers while we maul each other’s mouths.

“It *is* closed,” I grunt, one hand sliding down his back while the other holds his jaw.

It’s *so* sharp and chiseled, feeling it move while he kisses me has my cock stiff as a pole, jammed in between our bodies. I yank his lower back to feel… and yea, he’s hard too. So, *so* hard.

God-fucking-damn, why does his dick feel so good??

“Lock it,” he demands, sliding his tongue into my mouth to pet mine. “The door, Avi… Please lock it.”

Fuck… his tongue. I really like his tongue in my mouth…

This is so bad.

Reaching behind him, I manage to lock the door, my hand immediately coming back to him, gripping his ass and kneading it hard in my fingers until he mewls.

“Is it locked??” he breathes in between wild, fevered kisses.

“*Yes*, Kyran, it’s fucking locked,” I grumble at his control-freakishness, tugging his hair in my fist and sucking hard enough to bruise his annoying mouth.

“Then barricade it,” he whines, shuddering against me.

I chuckle into his mouth. “With what?”

“I don’t care, just do it,” he croaks, rumbly, pleading desperation in his tone. “No one can find out about this. *No one*, Avi, do you fucking hear me??”

I nod while licking his lip and pulling it between my teeth. “Yes, baby, I hear you.”

“Don’t fucking call me that,” he hisses, and I shove him against the door.

“Sorry… I thought you were someone else,” I tease, biting him until he purrs again. My cock is fucking *pulsing* this is so good. “Use your big, sexy body to block the door.”

“Shut up,” he growls. “This changes nothing. I still hate you…”

“Mhm.” I nod, fiercely grinding my cock against his through our pants.

“And this is still just for the money…”

“But we’re not recording.” I brush my palm over his nipple through his shirt. He whines, and I *swear to God*, I’m falling apart right now.

“Then fucking *record*,” he pants, trailing a hand down my front, eager fingers playing with the buttons on my shirt.

I don’t think I need to record right now, a thought that brings a sliver of awareness to my mind. I have no idea what we’re doing, but I’m certain it has nothing to do with the fans.

Still, I need to use my head here; keep us in line, and most importantly, keep Kyran from freaking out. *If he wants to record, then we record.*

And I won’t say the idea of capturing this surreal moment isn’t an alluring one.

So I pull my phone out of my pocket, attempting to kiss him while opening up my camera. I press record and hold the phone up as best I can as

we devour one another's lips like they're some sort of insanely delicious snack. Writhing our bodies together, I rub my erection on his, feeling it rock-hard and throbbing through his jeans.

"That feel good?" I whisper, sucking possessively on his lower lip.

He nods and whines, "Yea… *Yes*. It feels… really good."

"What about if I kiss you here?" My mouth trails down his jaw, onto his throat, tongue peeking out to swipe his Adam's apple. It bobs, and I bite it, to which he rumbles a sweet, choked sound. "Shh… Quiet, beautiful."

"No pet names," he snarls, though his hands are now on my ass and he's holding me to him, helping my hips thrust into his. "I'm not your *boyfriend*."

"Yea, no shit. You're not my type," I murmur, using my free hand to reach up underneath his shirt and feel his smooth, warm skin. "This is for the fans, right?"

He nods again. "For the fans." Moaning softly, he whispers, "Suck on my ear."

A slightly triumphant smirk tugs at my lips while I move them up to his ear. "Say please."

"*Please*," he begs through gritted teeth, like he wishes he didn't have to submit to me, but it feels too good for him to care all the way.

Flicking his lobe with my tongue, I suck it between my lips, toying with him until he's trembling and squirming.

"Do I do it better than her…?" My hips ripple into his, both of our dicks straining against our pants, all thick and solid and *aching* for more contact.

"Fuck off… *Avi*." He gasps my name, head tipped back on the door. "Mmm… ohh*fuck*…"

He's tightening all over, and I feel like it means he might come, which draws my balls up so tight they're about to rupture. Moving my mouth back to his, I kiss him rough, rubbing our cocks together with so much friction it's like we're trying to start a fire.

"You feel so fucking good…" I tell him, and he whimpers.

"I don't wanna come in my pants…" he whines hoarsely, but I can tell part of him doesn't care. Just like the bigger, more insistent part of me doesn't care one bit if I coat the inside of my Calvins with cum right now.

Still, I hum onto his lips, "You want me to take it out?" He nods fast while my hand falls to his cock between us. "You want me to catch your hot load in my mouth?"

“*Ffuck*… Avi…” He fingers dig into me through my clothes.

“I think it’s too late.” I suck the words onto his puffy lips. “*Come* for me, baby.”

“I’m not your—*fuuuck*. Fuck yes, oh God, Avi, I’m *coming*.”

Kyran’s body shudders, his hands flying up into my hair to hold me in place while he cries quietly into my mouth. My hand squeezes and grips his big dick though his pants, stroking out his orgasm while I grind my own into his hip.

“Fuck, I’m gonna come in my pants for you, Ky…” Before the words even flee my lips into his, pulses of cum are shooting all over the inside of my boxers, drenching my pelvis in slickness.

“What… *the fuck…*” Kyran crumples between me and the door, holding up his body weight by clutching onto me while we both quiver and suck all the air out of the small room.

We’re just standing, more like leaning, on each other, and the door, for many generous seconds, catching our breath and coming down from the withering high of what just happened.

What the fuck did *just happen??*

We made out and dry-humped each other silly, that’s what happened.

Kyran’s hands slide off of me, and he tries to stand up straight, wobbling as he does. I straighten myself and pull away, but not without first pressing a soft kiss on his bottom lip.

And when I stand back, he looks shocked, severely rumpled, sated, and horrified.

Mostly good things, I suppose.

Ending the recording on my phone—I’m not even sure *what* I just recorded—I can’t help but smirk to myself. *I knew he came in his pants that night because of me. I win.*

“That was…” he starts.

And I blurt out, “Awesome?”

“*Idiotic*,” he corrects me, pushing his hair back with his fingers and going for some toilet paper.

“Baby wipes.” I nod at the basket by the sink, and he grabs them.

“Good looks.”

He uses them to try to clean himself up inside his pants, while I do the same, my thoughts speeding through everything that just went down in this bathroom.

What an amazing shitshow…

"How the fuck are we going to get out of here without anyone seeing us both leave?" he rasps, rubbing his eyes in front of the mirror.

He looks stressed. *And so soon after such a killer orgasm.* It puts a damper on my own mood, because I don't want him to be nervous, or afraid.

"Everyone's drunk. I guarantee they won't notice," I tell him, and he peers at me. "But you can leave first. I'll wait a few minutes, then sneak out. Trust me, no one pays attention to me at these parties. I'm, like, invisible."

Kyran's head cocks, and his lips part like he's going to say something. But he doesn't. He just nods, then bites his lip, his eyes sliding back to himself in the mirror.

I have no idea what prompts me to say this… Maybe I'm just drunk, coasting on the high of that fantastic, if not foolhardy orgasm…

But watching him stare at himself in the mirror like he has no idea who he is has the words tumbling out of my mouth. "We should fuck sometime."

Kyran's face whips around, and he glares at me like I've completely lost my mind. Maybe I have… Because no sane, rational person would say what I just said. *Right?*

He grumbles, "I don't want to—"

But I cut him off with my finger on his lips and murmur, "We both know you do." My hand slips away, and he stays quiet, his eyes falling to my mouth. "Plus… it's for the fans. The *OnlyFans*, I mean."

"I'm not gonna fuck you for money, Avi," he growls.

My gaze narrows at him. "Who says *you'd* be fucking *me*?"

He stares at me for a moment in silence before a laugh bubbles from within his throat. It's amazing how little I've heard him laugh… It looks and sounds foreign when he does it.

"You're delusional," he sighs, pushing me out of the way and going for the door. But his fingers sort of graze my abs as he does, and he peeks at me one last time, reaching for the knob. "Leave it alone, Avi."

My lips quirk as I step off to the side, out of view. "No promises, superstar."

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

PoundTown69: Are you a raisin? Cuz you're raisin my dick
FranknBeanz: Ass so tight I could crack my nuts on it
Bearb0tt0m: What has 3 holes? ur favorite t shirt and me—I want in

Kyran

"Someone's checking you out."

My eyes lift from the words on the page. And sure enough, there's a girl I definitely recognize, sitting a few tables over, smiling at me and twirling her hair around her finger.

"Oh, yea. I'm sure that wouldn't be disastrous or anything," I mutter sarcastically, gaze falling back down to the book in front of me.

"Hey, football players and cheerleaders are, like, a known thing," Guty says while absentmindedly flipping pages of his book, not even pretending to study. "Plus, you and Lexi aren't exclusive, right?"

No, we are… not.

I shake my head. "We haven't even really hooked up in weeks, aside from the occasional makeout session." *Which usually only seems to happen as a means to get a rise out of people…*

My jaw tenses, and I redirect my thoughts.

"Hey, I love a good makeout session." Guty grins, and when my eyes fling up to his, he winks.

I'm not trying to think about making out…

In bathrooms. With tall, muscle-clad smug, smirking… humans.

Squeezing my eyes shut tight, I shake it off and try to go back to my reading. But I'm getting nowhere because Guty has zero interest in

studying. All he wants to do is talk shit, which is why I knew inviting him to the library with me was a bad idea.

Still, I could use the distraction. Because lately whenever I'm by myself, the silence seems to echo louder than someone screaming directly in my face.

"Then maybe you should take Lexi off my hands." I shoot Guty a smirk, and he laughs.

"I'll take one for the team. If it means *you* get to take a stab at Little Miss Flirty Eyes over there." He leans back in his chair, prompting me to glance up once more at the girl in the back.

Her name is Krystle, and she's also a cheerleader, which means I wouldn't have to put in much effort at all to get with her. Guty wasn't wrong. Football players and cheerleaders go together like peanut butter and jelly.

But the nagging little voice in the back of my mind keeps on insisting that I'm growing bored with peanut butter and jelly. Especially when there are so many other interesting sandwiches out there…

No. I shake my head again. No, peanut butter and jelly is *fine*. It's a classic, and everybody loves it. There's no need to be thinking about grilled fluffer-nutters with banana, or apple brie paninis, or all those other exotic, *different* sandwiches when the standard, regular ones do exactly what they're supposed to do. Nourish you.

That's what food is, after all. Sustenance. No more, no less.

Move on, Kyran. It doesn't matter.

Suddenly, I'm feeling impatiently determined. I need a new distraction, one that's more captivating than simply focusing on schoolwork. I need to hook up, to prove to myself that everything is fine. *Nothing* happened the other day in the bathroom, and it wasn't the most exciting thing I've ever experienced in my whole life.

It was a mistake. An accident.

I was drunk, that's it. I never need to even think about it again, because it *didn't* happen. *Deny deny deny.*

Standing up, I pack my books into my backpack and mumble to Guty, "I'll catch you later."

I hear him murmuring, "Get some, playboy," as I saunter casually over to the back table.

Sliding into the seat next to her, I show Krystle my well-rehearsed charming grin, and she bites her lip to contain her obvious excitement.

“Hey, Ky,” she whispers, already oozing temptation, which bodes well for my plan.

“Hi, beautiful,” I hum, then wince.

“Shh… Quiet, beautiful.”

Nope. Stop it right now. Stop remembering that thing that never happened.

“Are you excited about the first playoff game?” Krystle asks, distracting me from my inner turmoil, which I really fucking appreciate.

“Fuck yea.” I grin. “Beating Virginia Tech on home soil is gonna be so satisfying.”

She giggles, and continues on with the hair-twirling. “Well, if you ever need to, ya know… blow off some steam.” She bites her lip again. “You know where to find me.”

“Here in the library?” I tease, and she laughs at my dumb joke, smacking me playfully on the arm.

This is good. This could work.

“Actually, I think I’m done.” She slaps her book shut. “Wanna get out of here?”

Yes. This will definitely *work. Distraction-mode: activated.*

“Sounds like a plan.”

Standing up, I grab her backpack for her—*being all chivalrous and shit*—as we leave the library, and I ignore Guty humping the air in my direction when we walk past him.

I’m fully prepared to go back to this girl’s dorm with her, but we don’t even get that far. We’re actually not even out of the building before she shoves me into the bathroom.

Oh no… Not the bathroom.

Krystle sneaks inside and closes the door behind her, locking it and immediately lunging at me. Dropping our bags with a thunk, I grasp her face and accept the kiss she’s throwing my way, her lips hungrily attacking mine as her hands slither all over me.

“You’re so fucking hot,” she purrs into my mouth, grinding her small, petite body on me. “I’ve wanted to hook up with you for so long.”

“Mmmhm...” is all I can manage to say with her tongue pushing into my mouth.

My hands cup her ass, hauling her into me, which is easy because she's almost a foot shorter and weighs practically nothing. Gripping and squeezing her butt, I can't help but recognize how it's much less muscular than the last one I hand in my hands…

Fuck. Stop it.

I'm instantly sweaty and hot beneath my clothes, my mind working overtime to focus on what I'm doing. Focus on the *girl* I'm kissing… Her small, shapely form… Perky tits pushing against my chest.

This is what I like. Tits. They're rubbing all over me while our tongues tangle, her flowery, feminine scent filling my nose.

My limbs are abnormally rigid, lungs tight like I'm suffocating, but I push past it. I ignore the fuck out of all of these stupid little thoughts and *focus*.

"I know this is bad…" Krystle whispers while sucking on my lip. "If Lexi found out, she'd be so pissed."

"I don't… I'm not…" My words are getting caught in my throat, the mere act of trying to form a sentence taking a backseat to me just trying not to freak out about how small she is.

This is what I'm used to, goddamnit. Not… that other thing that did not happen, *for fuck's sake.*

"I like it, though." She keeps on talking, not picking up on how much I'm on the verge of a major freakout. Her lips pry away from mine and move over to my ear. *Oh no…* "It's like it's… forbidden."

She sucks my earlobe between her lips, and I cringe.

"Do I do it better than her…?"

Shut up! Go away, Goddamn you!

I can't fucking breathe. My lungs are burning like they're running out of available oxygen. It feels like the room is getting smaller and smaller and…

My hands gently shove Krystle off of me while I frantically suck in air, struggling to breathe.

Her hands run over my chest, and she chirps, "Are you okay?"

Head wobbling, I rake my fingers through my hair, eyes creeping open to peek down at her. She probably thinks I'm a massive freak, which clearly, I am. So I say the first thing that comes to mind to get me out of this situation…

"I'm sorry… I can't." I gulp. "I can't do this to… Lexi."

Snatching my bag, I reach behind her to unlock the door. I know this looks awful, and I really don't want this girl to run around spreading rumors that I'm a fucking weirdo, so I kiss her on the head before opening the door.

"I'm sorry, Krystle. You're great, but I just… need to figure things out with Lexi before I hook up with anyone else. You understand, right?"

She doesn't look thrilled, but her wide eyes are sympathetic as she nods and shows me a small smile. "You're a good guy, Kyran. Remember… I'm always here if you need me."

Right. Awesome.

"Thanks," I mutter, storming out of the bathroom as fast as my legs will carry me.

Running away… Away from the memory of panting and kissing and hushed words in the bathroom.

I've been staring at myself in the mirror for far too long.

So long that I don't even recognize the face looking back at me anymore.

Who are you…?

Where did you come from?

I can't have this. I can't have *any* of it. One of the biggest games of my football career is coming up in a few days, and my head needs to be clear. I need to be all in it, not spiraling out of control like a satellite that's fallen out of orbit, lost and tumbling through space.

I need to clear my head, and figure out what the hell is wrong with me.

I need to get laid.

The problem with hooking up with Krystle was that it was too new. It threw me off. That *has* to be it… Even though she's just another cheerleader, she was different. *Sort of.*

Stomping into the other room, I grab a bottle of Jack Daniels and take a large gulp. I'm going to sort this out. *I have to.*

Removing my phone from my pocket, I type out a text to Lexi…

Me: Are you around?

She writes back almost immediately.

Lexi: I'm at my dorm. Waiting for you ;)

Perfect.

I text back an eggplant emoji followed by five water-squirts, then pocket my phone and rip another shot from the bottle. Drinking excessively is another good way to numb myself to all the realities infecting my thoughts. But I don't have time to casually get blasted, since I'm in a rush to get this over with; sink my dick in Lexi's pussy and prove once and for all that everything is *fine*, and mistakes or not, I'm still *me*.

Kyran Harbor. Eagles QB. Exceptional student, with a sick body and great hair. Not to be hypnotized or coerced into unnamed things by whatever trickster voodoo certain stoner stepsiblings might possess.

Choking down several more large swallows of booze, my vision is already blurring as I leave my dorm and set out on a mission to Vanderslice Hall. I get there quick, hazy and barely remembering the walk as I take the elevator to Lexi's floor. Staggering up the hall, I pound on her door, and she opens it, wearing nothing but my football jersey.

See? This is why she's the safe bet.

Relief washes over me as she pulls me inside, closing and locking the door behind her.

"Mandy will be back in a half-hour," she breathes, tugging my mouth to hers by my jaw. "We have to make it quick."

"You got any booze?" I murmur on her lips, needing a few more shots for good measure. To make sure all the memories are sufficiently drowned to death.

She nods, kissing me a few more times before spinning away and scampering to grab a bottle of Fireball. *The cinnamon standard for college kids, apparently.*

Uncapping it, I slug it back, nearly choking when Lexi stuffs her hand inside my pants to grab my dick. Her fingers are small and dainty, and I close my eyes, focusing on the sensation of her stroking my cock… Which is pretty much a limp noodle right now.

My teeth grind together. *Come on… It feels good, you know it does.*

Taking another big sip, my head feels like a bowling ball. My neck can barely hold it up anymore.

Clearly, Lexi is just as determined as I am to make this work, because she gives up on the handy and drops to her knees, unzipping my pants and

shoving them down with my boxers. My blurring vision falls down to her head of blonde hair, seeing double as both of her slip my barely hard cock into their mouths.

It feels good… It *does*, but I'm a fucking mess and I know it. Nothing is working… I'm too up in my head.

"You feel so fucking good…"

Eyes drooping shut, my head tips back and I bite my lip, remembering a much greedier mouth. One that sucked me with hesitation framing the curious need.

"Fuck…" I swallow hard, biting down hard on my lip as my erection finally gains some traction.

That mouth was warm and wet, too. The lips were so soft, the tongue so playful… Teasing my head the same way it teased my own tongue…

"Suck me."

A whimper of a noise leaves my lips and I try like hell to cover it up. I don't want to be thinking about this… I don't want to be remembering him while I'm getting head from a girl.

"You want me to catch your hot load in my mouth?"

Growling, I force my eyes open to watch the girl on her knees, bobbing below my waist. *That's* who I should want… No one else.

But I can't stop seeing him. I can't stop thinking about all the little details missing from this supple creature.

"Go away…" I rub my eyes hard with my fingers. "I don't want you."

Lexi pops off my dick. "Ky, are you feeling alright?"

Shaking my head, I mutter, "Uh, yea… No…" I scrape a hand over my face. "I don't know."

She stands up, taking the bottle before it slips from my fingers. "We can just go into the bedroom if you want…" Her small hand runs up my chest. "You can fuck me from behind—"

Pulling back, I stumble away from her. "No. No, I'm sorry, babe. I'm actually not… feeling well."

Turning before I can embarrass myself any further, I head for the door.

Fuck this. It's fucking hopeless.

I'm broken.

Damaged.

He fucking *ruined* me.

"Kyran, wait!" Lexi shrills after me, but it's too late.

I’m already out the door, stalking away. Running away. *Again.*

I’m fuming as I leave Vanderslice, marching through the chill of December air. My blood is boiling, fury weaving through every cord of muscle in my body. I’m half-cocked between vibrant rage and drunken belligerence, which is a bad combo. Because no matter how hard I try to overcome it, they both bring me to the same place…

Thomas More Apartments, room 446.

My fist slams three times against the door in rapid succession. Jagged breaths flutter my chest, jaw ticking at the sound of footsteps on the other side. It opens a crack, the iridescent gray hitting me as the final strike of a match tossed onto a bonfire soaked in kerosene.

His lips part, but before he can even try to make some sort of remark, I barrel inside and tackle him to the floor.

Avi lands beneath me with a grunt and my hands immediately circle his throat.

“You fucking ruined me!” My fingers dig in as his hands fly up, attempting to hold me back. “This is all your fault!”

“W-what?? *What’s* my fault?!” he croaks, struggling out from under me.

But I pin him down with my body weight, shooting unbridled frustration at him through my eyes. “Everything! All of it.” I’m smoldering, burning up beneath my clothes as his hands grip my forearms, trying to pry them away from his neck. “We should *fuck sometime??* Are you fucking kidding me?!”

“Kyran… Calm down,” he chokes, his face turning red from my fingers cutting off his air supply. “We can talk about this…”

“I don’t want to talk to you,” I snarl, leaning over his face.

He blinks. “Then what do you want to do?”

“I want to *kill* you,” I hiss, emotions taking over, the hate, weakness, and confusion mixing together like a lethal combination of chemicals, flooding my system. “I want to destroy you like you destroyed me.”

“How did I destroy you??” he grunts, using all of his strength to push my arms back; hold my weight from crushing his throat.

“With your stupid fucking ideas,” I teem, suddenly exhausted. *Tired… So, so tired of fighting.* “Your bullshit plans and your asinine fucking rationales. *You* got me into this… You and your *fucking mouth*.”

Sighing out of hopeless despair, my grip around his neck loosens and my forehead crashes onto his. I feel depleted, like there’s nothing left. I’m

just so tired, I could collapse.

Avi doesn't move. He stays lying on the floor beneath me, his hands sliding carefully from my forearms onto my hands. He moves them off of his throat, down onto his chest, sucking in a long breath of air as my body drapes over him in surrender.

"You fucked me up…" I whisper. "I couldn't get hard."

"Huh?"

"When I was hooking up with Lexi… I couldn't even get *hard*. Because your dumb fucking words poisoned my brain."

Avi is still, just breathing, our chests resting together as they move in tandem, up and down. His hips shift and he squirms.

"What?" I growl, annoyed that he seems like he wants to move when all I want to do is just lie here and pretend we're both dead.

"I mean…" His voice creeps out in a hesitant rumble, "You're hard right now…"

My jaw tenses. "No, I'm not."

"Yea… you are." He moves his hips again, and I feel it, like a wave of sensation raining tingles between my legs. "Your dick is… *fuck*, it's like stone."

Lifting my head just a little, I peek in between our bodies at the visible erection trying to fight its way out of my pants. Another hopeless sigh comes from my mouth, and this time I drop my head down onto his shoulder.

"Why am I so hard?" I whine, so goddamn *confused* and full of resentment. "Why am I hard *now*…? It's so fucking stupid. My dick is broken."

"Jesus, how drunk are you?" Avi chuckles, and it annoys me enough to lift my head again.

"You broke my dick." I glare at him.

He's clearly trying to stifle a smirk as he raises his fingers to brush them through my hair. "Yea, I don't think that's it."

Jerking away from his touch, I roll off of him onto my back. "Whatever. I'm fucked. I'm probably gonna lose to Virginia Tech, *again*, all because I can't get my head on straight…"

Before I can even process it, he rolls on top of me, straddling me and pinning my wrists to the floor. My eyes widen, heat rushing up my neck.

"Then let me help you." His head tilts as he gazes curiously down at me.

I swallow a thick, scratchy gulp. “How…?”

Sloping his face over mine, he stops when the tips of our noses are touching. “Give your dick what it wants.”

Shivers sheet my flesh, though I’m so hot it’s like I’m standing on the sun. I force a shake of my head while gawking up at him. “My dick is a moron.”

He chuckles, bringing even more warmth to my face. “That’s probably true… But who cares? Stop fighting what feels good, Kyran.”

Stop *fighting.*

My brain wants me to protest. To insist that this isn’t me, and that I hate him, because he’s a stoner dipshit who smiles way too much, and doesn’t know me *at all*.

But at the same time, I *am* tired. Tired of pretending this stupid secret business isn’t the most exciting thing I’ve ever done. Tired of acting like it doesn’t thrill me to my bones to know that people are begging and pleading to see what we can do behind closed doors.

It doesn’t have to mean anything… Not right now.

Maybe right now it’s the opposite of football. A way to give up control and responsibility… And just be stupid with him. *For a little while…*

Until we make the money we need. And then it’ll be done.

Pressing my lips together, I wobble my head in a little shake, because I don’t know what to say.

But Avi doesn’t seem to care that I’m lost, or confused or unsure. He eases his lips onto mine, just a soft brush before whispering, “We should *fuck*, Kyran.”

My heart is racing, fingers threading through his where he’s holding my hands down as I mutter, “For the fans… Right?”

His lashes flutter and he peers down at me, nodding slowly. “Yea. Yea, totally… For the fans.”

I don’t even want to think about how hard my dick is right now. It’s way too confusing. Instead, I just focus on the task at hand. *The business.*

“Are you sure you can handle me… fucking you…” I choke on the words. “In the ass?”

He breathes a rumbling laugh, pressing his hips down onto mine, our dicks reacquainted once more. I *despise* how much it lights me the fuck up. “The way I see it, the other way around might make more sense.”

A nervous chill sweeps through me, and I shake my head. “No way. You are *not* putting your dick anywhere near my ass.”

“Says who?” he hums, brushing his lips down my jaw.

“Says me.”

“Mmm… You don’t know what you want.” He drops a kiss on my throat. “I think you might *love* me fucking you… in the ass.”

A soft sound gasps from my lips, and I cover it by clearing my throat. “No. You’re taking it.” He pulls back and gives me a squinting look. “End of discussion, Avi.”

“We’ll flip for it.” He grins.

“No fucking way!” I rip my hands out of his. “I’m not gonna flip a coin to decide who fucks who.”

“*Whom*.”

“I’m going to hit you.” I glare at him, sitting up on my elbows while he backs up.

“Okay, well, I’m not going to let you fuck me just because you think *you’re* in charge.” He scoffs. Then his fingers brush over the outline of my cock, and I shudder. “I think we both know you need to loosen the reins on that control that keeps you all bunched up with stress.”

I roll my eyes. “So you’re saying a ride on your dick is like a trip to a day spa?”

“Could be.” His grin widens, and he shrugs. “You’ll never know if you don’t try…”

“See, this is why we can’t do this,” I sigh. “We can’t agree on anything.”

Avi crawls off of me and rises to his feet. “That’s where you’re wrong.” He extends his hand to me, and I stare at it. “I think we *can* agree, you just need to stop being so stubborn.”

Puffing out an exhale, I allow my shoulders to fall back, easing out of my inner tension long enough to take his hand. He yanks me to my feet, but doesn’t let go.

Instead, he drags me, stumbling, into his bedroom.

“What…” My eyes fall to his bed, where we sucked each other off the last time I was here, and I gulp. “What did you have in mind…?”

“Neither of us have ever done any butt stuff before…” He cocks an eyebrow at me. “Right?”

My teeth grind together, grumbling over the noise in my head. “No. Definitely not.”

“So if either one of us is going to get fucked in the ass, we’ll need to prepare for it.” He stares at me, like he’s waiting for a reaction. But I’m just staring back. “Like, priming.”

“Priming??” I huff. “What kind of word is *priming*?”

“It’s a word, don’t worry about it.” He tugs his shirt over his head, then shoves his pants down.

And he’s not wearing any boxers underneath. So now he’s just standing, *naked* in front of me, in only a backwards cap and a smirk, like something about this is fucking funny.

“Dude… what the fuck.” I look away, and he laughs.

“Kyran, for fuck’s sake…” He sighs, strutting over to his bed and crashing down onto it. “How are we going to have sex if you can’t even look at me naked?”

“That’s a great question…” I mutter, peeking at him.

He’s lying on his side, watching me. Dick half-hard, head propped up by his elbow. And I’m buzzing with all sorts of things… Mostly annoyance. Because he’s so goddamn irritating, but I can’t help how I feel compelled to counter him.

To let go of my hang-ups and match his energy; to prove I’m not the uptight, preppy asshole he thinks I am.

So in that spirit, I yank my shirt over my head, tossing it onto the floor. Then I step out of my shoes and my jeans. Avi’s dark eyebrow arches, and I roll my eyes, slowly easing my boxer briefs down my legs and kicking them away.

The way he blatantly drools over my cock is pretty satisfying. But it’s also nerve-racking, and like an instinct, my hands cup my dick and balls to cover them up. Unfortunately, I’m still sort of hard, so half my dick is peeking out, and I can’t help it.

“Will you come here, please?” he rumbles calmly. I shake my head, and he gives me an impatient look. “Kyran… stop being ridiculous. Get that sexy ass over here. Now.”

My teeth grind together, and I mumble, “I hate you so fucking much,” stepping over hesitantly and taking a seat at the edge of the bed.

“Yea, I know. You’ve made that very clear.” He spreads his legs, and my eyes find a spot on the wall to focus on.

“Avi, Jesus…” I shake my head. “You’re like—”

“Dude, stop dancing around it.” He sits up and grabs my arm, pulling me on top of him. “We both have dicks, and balls, and assholes.” Gazing down at him, I gulp with my face on fucking fire. “Let me ask you something… Do you like the idea of pushing your cock inside me?”

My dick jumps like it’s answering the question on its own, and I bite my lip, trying to pretend I’m not fully aware of how red my cheeks are right now.

“Yea, now you know how I feel.” Avi grins, eyes falling to my cock. “I guess he’s not such a moron after all, huh?”

“I’m not so sure about that,” I retort, *way* breathier than I wish I sounded.

“At least he isn’t afraid to admit what he wants to do…” he sings, letting go of me and scooting over to his nightstand.

He digs around in a drawer for a moment while I just sit in his bed, baking to death from the sheer humiliation of this situation. I thought I was drunk, but all of the inhibition lowering in the world couldn’t get me ready for whatever the hell is happening right now.

Avi returns with a bottle of lube, and my spine stiffens, eyes going round at the sight.

“What… what’s that for?”

He chuckles. “It’s called *lube*. It *lubricates* things.”

I glare at him. “No shit, asshole. I mean, what are we going to do with it… To figure out who fucks… *whom*?”

He beams in delight, and I roll my eyes again. “Like I said, we’ll need to get primed up to take a dick. So I figure the best way to decide who’s going to bottom is to see which one of us enjoys it more. The priming.”

My brows zip together. “What?”

“I’m not repeating myself,” he grumbles, opening the tube and squirting Astroglide onto his fingers. “Do you want to use your own fingers, or should we do it to each other?”

My mouth hangs open for a solid five seconds. I’m not sure I’ve ever been so baffled by anything in my whole life.

Like, really… What the fuck am I even doing here??

“Kyran…” Avi whispers my name in this low, grungy sort of tone that covers me in goosebumps. “Do you want to finger me? Or do you want to watch me finger myself…?”

“I… I don’t know,” I stammer, crazy lightheaded all of a sudden.

He grabs my hand. “Don’t think, just answer.”

“I want to…” I croak with saliva filling my mouth. “I wanna do it.”

He crawls over me, and I have no choice but to recline onto my back. “You wanna finger me?” I nod fast, practically breaking out in hives as he pushes my legs apart, kneeling between them. “Okay, good. I’ll finger you while you finger me. First one to get off bottoms.”

“Wha-what?? No…” My lips are shivering, but he’s ignoring me; my words of trepidation, my obvious rampant trembling.

He simply squeezes a generous helping of lube out onto my fingers, tossing the bottle and lowering himself over me. It’s clear that I’m a statue frozen in awkwardness right now, because he rolls his eyes and throws his leg over my arm, so that my hand is closer to his ass.

“Get on board, Kyran.” His eyes fall to my cock. “Look how excited you are… You want to do this, so stop talking yourself out of it.”

Letting out a jittery breath, I nod. Because yea… I guess if I’m being honest, I would really like to see how it feels to push my fingers inside of him. Much more than I want to feel his fingers pushing inside me.

Though there is that teeny, tiny frisson inside me, wondering if I’ll like it.

If he’ll hurt me… Or if he’ll make it feel *really* good…

Fear flickers in my brain, but I turn it off. I focus on Avi, and how confident he seems. How afraid he *isn’t*… How warm he *is*.

Gripping onto his thigh with my left hand, I slowly move my slick fingers until they slide between his cheeks. He grunts and swallows visibly, the first sign of vulnerability I’ve gotten from him all night. It gives me the surge of adrenaline I need to swirl my fingertip around his rim.

“One first…?” I ask, way too hoarse, but not even caring. My dick is fucking throbbing, balls aching already.

“I think that would be best,” he breathes, then wedges his index finger between my ass.

“W-wait…” My chest is heaving like crazy and it’s bordering on embarrassing. “I need to… relax.”

“Okay, fine. I’ll give you a head start.” He licks his lips.

“Stop watching me,” I grumble, and he grins.

Lowering his face to mine, he hums over my lips. “Is this better?”

Out of my desire to regain some control, or maybe even to take his cockiness down a peg, I stuff my finger inside him slowly, easing it into his ass up to my knuckle with no warning.

He groans and shivers. “Jesus fucking Christ…”

“Do you… do you like it?” I whisper, my cock leaking at the feeling of the warm, super tight channel of his body gripping my finger.

“It’s… different,” he hums, brushing his own fingertip over my hole, and I’m *quaking*. I draw my finger back, pumping it in again until he whimpers, “Slow, baby.”

“If you call me *baby* again, I’ll stuff my whole hand in here,” I growl, and he chuckles, dragging his lips down to kiss my neck.

I *hate* how it gives me chills and thumps my nuts, the same way I hate how he’s not intimidated by me one bit. He’s not *afraid*, and it’s just… frustrating.

Using my hand, I drive into him slowly, pulling back and pushing in, working up a tantalizing rhythm inside his ass while he writhes his body against mine. His lips go for my earlobe, and I really fucking loathe how good it feels… How it tingles in the pit of my stomach, making me forget all the concerns and hang-ups surrounding what we’re doing.

It feels *so good*, in fact, that I barely notice how his finger is nudging its way inside me, using the slippery wetness of the lube to gradually probe me. Until the next thing I know, his finger is in me up to the knuckle, and I’m clenching on him in hot, aching need.

“Holy *fffuck*…” I groan, dizzy and seeing stars already.

It feels bizarre… The burn of doing something wrong that somehow sizzles all my nerve endings with a hidden pleasure I wasn’t sure was there.

“You like it?” he rasps, hot breath on my ear flipping me upside down.

“No…” I bite my lip to contain the sounds that want to betray my words.

“Stop lying to me, you tight, sexy thing,” he growls, then eases another finger inside me.

“Uhhmmffuck *no*… *yesss*… I do… I like it,” I gasp and whine as his fingers reach deep inside me.

They graze something that lights up my entire body.

My toes curl. My back arches.

“Say you want me to fuck you in your perfect, sweet little ass,” Avi whispers over my lips.

And I tumble. My stomach bunches, my ass clenches on his fingers…

And I fucking *come*.

Crying, whimpering, mewling like a slutty little kitten, my dick sprays pulses of cum all over both of us, without any provocation other than two fingers stuffed deep in my ass for literally less than sixty seconds. My entire body is trembling, from head to toe, I'm jerking and writhing, practically convulsing.

"Fuck… me." I don't even know what I'm saying, but I'm shooting everywhere and it feels like someone's tapped into a well of bliss inside me. "*Fuck me fuck me fuck me…*"

I hum the words over and over again while Avi rides me out, not even moving his fingers, just leaving them up there, brushing his lips over mine like he's breathing my breaths.

By the time I've floated back down to earth, I'm sweaty and sticky and sated beyond belief. Avi pulls his fingers out of me slowly, and it takes me way too long to notice that my fingers aren't even in him anymore. Because I was using both of my hands to hold on to his hips for dear life, like I was on a rollercoaster and not properly strapped in.

Allowing my eyes to creep open, I peek up at him. And he's just grinning at me. *Smugly*, I might add.

I swallow and blink. That's all I can do.

He purses his lips, swiping his fingers through the cum all over my chest. "Well, then…" His eyes spring back up to mine, and I didn't think it was possible, but my cheeks flush ever harder. "Looks like we found our bottom."

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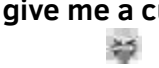
CHAPTER FIFTEEN

GunsNGloryhole: Stuff me like taxidermy and mount me against your wall.
MagicNotMike: I know two ways to make seven inches disappear…
Shyfan995: I'm so thirsty, can you give me a cup of milk?..Orr two would be much nicer



It's a big night.

First game of the playoffs. And against Virginia Tech, no less.

They're undefeated so far this season. Their offense is apparently not to be trifled with, and out of all the teams in the NCAA, they're the Eagles's biggest rivals. Mainly because we lost to them in the playoffs last year, which swept the championship rug out from under my superstar stepbrother.

All season, Kyran's been stressing about taking on the Hokies—*dumb team name, but whatever.* He's beat teams with better defense, stronger QBs, and all-around fantastic records; teams who have won way more championships than Virginia Tech ever has. But because of that loss last season… *This* is the one that's been clicking his normally uptight perfectionist levels up to full blast.

Tonight, we have the home field advantage, which is always a good thing. It also means that I get to be at the game, and as much as I love doing the Charleston in my eagle costume just to see how much I can annoy my stepbrother, I'll try my hardest not to mess with him too much tonight. If it means helping him win this game so he can finally calm the hell down a little, I'll be on my best behavior.

I mean, I'm still me. *My* best behavior *is probably pretty appalling to most. But I'll do what I can.*

I’ve just taken the field as Baldwin the Eagle, with the cheerleaders, who are scampering around, scantily dressed in their maroon and gold outfits and an exorbitant amount of glitter. I’m doing my normal shuffle routine while they shimmy and shake their butts, and their pom-poms, to the music of *Applause* by Lady Gaga. Not the song I would have chosen, but it works to get the crowd all riled up.

Having fifty-thousand eyes on you is pretty overwhelming, but it helps that my head is covered. I’m just here to bring the good vibes, and make people laugh. I think it’s important to remember that at the end of the day, this is still a *game*.

I’m sure Kyran wouldn’t see it that way, but whatever. He’s no fun, we all know that.

The girls are finishing up their dance, and I’m prancing to and fro when everyone turns to cheer and whoop as the players jog out onto the field. Kyran is first in line, as usual, and I’m kind of glad his face is covered too, by his helmet.

I’m used to his undying seriousness harshing my mellow. But right now, for some reason, all I feel when I see him is a relentless bunch of nerves in my gut.

It could be because I’m anxious for him, knowing how important this game is and all. Or maybe it’s because of how we left things the other day…

You know, after we fingered each other and he came all over the place in a bewildering display of sexiness.

I was a little shocked when he didn’t leave a Kyran-shaped hole in the wall after what happened. Watching him jaunt onto the field and prepare for the coin toss, I remember him pulling on his pants…

“It doesn’t mean anything…” he grunted, cheeks still flushed from the shock of an unexpected prostate milking.

I bit my lip to contain my grin, handing him a washcloth so he could wipe the cum off his abs and chest. “Oh, it *definitely* means something.” He paused to stare at me, hazel eyes all wide, like a confused baby lamb. I chuckled. “Ky… you came in less than a minute. Nothing touching your dick… Just from my fingers. The jig is officially up. You’re a bottom.”

“*No*, I’m *not*,” he growled, holding on to his defenses like a shield in medieval battle. “It’s made to feel good. That’s what that… thing does.”

“Your prostate?” I folded my arms over my chest, and he scowled.

“It would feel good for anyone,” he huffed while wiping himself down. “It doesn’t mean I want to get fucked.”

“Okay… except that you do.” My face slanted, and he shook his head. “Boy, if other people worked as hard as you at denying themselves good things, we’d be living in a world without corndogs.” He scoffed, giving me a one of his looks while I stepped over to him slowly. “Are you a masochist or something? ’Cause I’ll edge you… if that’s what you want.”

“Fuck. Off.” He glared at me, practically vibrating in his state of seethe.

I chuckled softly, reaching out to touch his arm. Of course, he yanked it away. “I’m just saying… We hit the jackpot here. And by *jackpot*, I mean your hands-free orgasm ability. The fans will go nuts for this.”

Finishing cleaning himself off, his movements slowed as he bit his lip. “So you’re saying it’s like… a skill?”

His eyes slid up to meet mine, and I nodded enthusiastically, mostly placating him. I didn’t want him to be embarrassed over coming so quick, the first time anything ever breached his ass. For someone as *straight—quote, unquote—*as Kyran, getting off this way had the potential to jack up his fear and insecurities, and have him heading for the hills.

And I couldn’t have that. Mainly because I knew the kind of money we could make on OnlyFans with videos of us fucking. But also, because even though I hated to admit it, I *really* wanted to get him into bed.

After seeing him fall apart, and knowing how easily I could make it happen… it was the hottest experience of my life, and I wanted more.

I’m just as bad as the fans at this point. I’m chomping at the goddamn bit.

The kissing in the bathroom at Theo’s party was just the beginning. As much as I know craving action with Kyran is bad, because he’s my straight stepbrother who hates my guts, I can’t help the way I’m secretly desperate for more alone time with him.

I’ve decided to chalk it up to my newfound desire to mess around with dudes… Kyran just so happens to be the one showing up.

“And you didn’t… feel it?” he asked me, blinking curiously. “From my finger?”

I definitely did. His fingering felt *delicious*, and if it had gone on for more than a minute, I probably could have gotten off myself. Which reminded me of the ache in my balls from not coming…

“I felt it a little,” I told him truthfully, reaching down to adjust my erection in my sweats.

His eyes fell, then sprung back up to mine. And he frowned. “But you didn’t get to come… Because I came first.”

“I’m fine with it.” I shrugged casually, then arched a brow. “Unless you wanna help me out with this…” I slowly palmed my cock over my pants. “You know, *practice*.”

Witnessing him swallow as he scowled had me picturing all the things I wanted to do to him. *On camera, of course.* My skin was burning, balls tingling at the images my head was drumming up.

“Not interested. I’m not even agreeing to anything at all…” His voice trailed as he held out the dirty washcloth. “But if we *were* to do it, I’d want to watch the video before you upload it. To make sure it doesn’t look humiliating.”

I nodded, because it made sense. Neither of us has had sex with men before, so we don’t really know what to expect. I’ve been watching my fair share of gay porn over the last few months, while wrapping my head around the updated parameters of my sexuality. But I know Kyran isn’t well-versed in such activities.

As far as I know, he’s only ever done this stuff with me…

“You mean like how you football players watch the game tapes to improve your form?” I smirked, taking the cloth and tossing it in the direction of my hamper.

He rolled his eyes at me while he finished dressing. “You’re fucking annoying.”

And then he left.

No date was set for our next rendezvous, which doesn’t surprise me. It seems like we’re sort of stumbling through this whole thing with no real idea of what the hell we’re doing.

But each time he shows up at my dorm, we take a step in a new direction, only for him to ultimately regress back into his stubbornly set ways of denial. It’s frustrating for me, but I also can’t help but look forward to it. After all, the business is only growing.

And my appetite for sexual escapades with my stepbrother is turning into its own slightly inconvenient beast of burden.

The Eagles win the coin toss, an upper hand for sure. And the game kicks off with me on the sidelines, watching Kyran and jittering inside my

eagle suit.

They progress fast, taking advantage of the gaps in Virginia Tech's defense and sinking pass after pass down the field, scoring our first touchdown in less than two minutes.

Then, of course, the opposing team does the same, matching our energy while getting a few more blocks here and there. And before I know it, it's seven-seven and Kyran is running back onto the field.

I was made to expect nothing less after reading up on the Hokies. This game is already shaping up to be as intense as everyone knew it would be. And I'm just trying to flap my arms and stay out of my stepbrother's way as much as possible.

The first half goes rushing by like a whirlwind, and with the two-minute warning to halftime, Kyran stomps off the field, frazzled, to the sounds of Coach Matthews barking things at our defense.

He plops down on the bench, yanking off his helmet to have some water. I find myself kind of fluttering to his right, wanting to go over and talk to him, but also not wanting to get my head chewed off.

But to my surprise, he turns to me and says, "That asshole is mocking me."

I assume he means me at first. But then I realize he's talking *to* me, not *about* me, and I trot over, tilting my bird head at him.

"Johannes… Their quarterback." He pours more water into his mouth, the sight of which wiggles my fingers. "He's purposely going toe-to-toe, trying to run the exact plays we're running." He blinks up at me. "He wants to wear me out. Me and Guty…"

"Then don't let him," I mumble.

He scoffs and shakes his head, eyes going back onto the field, to the Hokies's QB, Mike Johannes, who's launching the ball to his wide receiver for a first-down.

I inch even closer to his side. "I'm serious, Kyran. If there's one thing I know about you, it's that you don't quit. You're stubborn as fuck. Use that. The defense will trip them up. As long as you don't stop hammering those balls down the field, you're golden."

He stares at me for a second, the corner of his mouth twitching. "Hammering balls." He huffs a tiny chuckle. "You're funny."

I'm literally frozen. I can't even comprehend the fact that he's smiling at me, on *purpose*, and paying me this endearing little compliment. It's so out

of the ordinary, for a second, I think I might be hallucinating.

Did I accidentally mix up my edibles with the mushroom ones again??

A boom of cheers tugs us both out of it, and our faces fling back to the field. Kyran leaps to his feet.

Johannes got sacked and the ball is loose.

Guys are diving all over it, and Kyran's chin is jerking left and right to try to make out who has it. When the ref pulls everyone off, Kyran hollers, "Fuck yea!"

We recovered the ball.

"Bitches *fumbling*!" I grab him by the shoulders, shaking him around while he laughs.

He shoots me a quick, elated grin before stuffing his helmet back on and jogging over to his guys.

I'm abnormally warm inside… my chest thumping with an excitement that seems new and shiny. And flustering, because of how much it relies on the person I despise. *Rhyming is fun.*

Biting my lip, I watch Kyran take the field, shouting things to his players.

He looks good… Is he supposed to look this good?

Am I supposed to notice how good he looks??

Shaking it off, I plop onto the bench and remind myself not to swoon.

Don't be swayed by timid smiles and the way his butt looks in those tight pants. He's still just your dickhead stepbrother.

Your secret business partner…

Nothing more.

My heart is officially lodged in my throat, which is pretty insane, considering how little I cared about football up until this point.

Sure, I get the appeal. I used to watch games on occasion, like that time the Patriots lost to the Giants in the Super Bowl and everyone in New York was acting like Eli Manning was a god all of a sudden for beating Tom Brady.

But sports have never really been my thing… Until right now.

Now that my school's team is barely clenching their lead against this goddamn force of an obnoxiously named team… Forty-five to thirty-eight, with two minutes left in the game.

Virginia Tech has the ball, and they're *insufferable*, first-downing it down the field, demanding a touchdown to tie the game. Kyran is sitting on the bench, his knee bouncing rapidly. His eyes refuse to leave Johannes. Every move the guy makes, Kyran is watching it. I can almost see the wheels turning in his mind, his obsessive raging thoughts screaming at him louder than all the noise in the stadium.

Nothing, not even my routine of pratfalls and Michael Jackson crotch-grabs, could get him to look away right now. He's zoned in.

And I don't want to admit it, but I'm nervous. Our defense is exhausted. Our offense is exhausted. This game is bordering on psychotic. At this point, I think we'd need a miracle to keep them from tying the game.

And unfortunately, miracles don't exist. Because with a minute left on the clock, the Hokies score a touchdown… And then they pull a motherfuckin' two-point conversion out of their asses, putting them in the lead.

Forty-six to forty-five.

Kyran's head is in his hands. I can all but feel the sting of him ripping his own hair out, and I have to do something. I don't know where the need to fix this comes from… I've never been one to feel compelled by empathy, but I just *can't* watch him crumble like this. *If he loses his confidence, then this thing is really over.*

"Ky…" I stomp up to him as he's standing, shoulders slumped in defeat. "Ky, it's not over until it's over, okay??"

"Shut up, Avi…" he breathes, slamming his helmet back down over his head.

"No. I won't," I growl, and his eyes meet mine from inside his helmet. I can only make him out through the stupid eyeholes of this eagle costume, but I make sure to lock my gaze with his anyway. For effect. "You've got this in the bag. Their defense is fucked right now, you hear me?"

He gives me a look, the desperation slowly fading into visible determination as Coach Matthews shouts at him.

"You don't go down without a fight… Trust me, I know." I smirk even though he can't see it.

His lips curve into a grin, but he crushes it and covers it with his usual scowl. “Fuck you.”

“Yes! Perfect.” I clap. “Use that anger and go kick some Hokie ass!”

Diving away from him, I jump up and down, facing the crowd. Lifting my hands over and over to signal *make some noise,* which they do. The crowd is screaming and hollering, the stands shaking with thundering noise and stomps to match the fading music of *“We Will Rock You.”*

I’m doing everything in my power to keep them going, rallying the hype in hopes that it’ll light a fire under the players’ asses. All we need is a field goal to win this thing…

When Kyran gets back on the field, his movements are sharp. He is definitely *not* going down without a fight. Four solid plays in a row, we gain first-downs. And Guty makes each one of them, breaking free from Virginia Tech’s frazzled defense, getting us down the field fast.

We’re on the five-yard line with ten seconds left on the clock, trying for a touchdown. If we don’t make this, it’s on Theo for the field goal. He hasn’t missed all season, but still. That’s a lot of pressure.

But Kyran Harbor clearly likes pressure. *A lot.*

The final snap happens, and Kyran steps back, looking around for his men. They’re all covered. It’s fucked.

So he runs.

He fucking *runs,* juking through the bodies, diving into the end zone *him fucking self* to score the winning touchdown.

I’ve never heard anything like what happens when the ref throws his arms in the air. It sounds like fucking war, or the apocalypse or something. People are screaming their damn lungs out, and to be honest, I might be one of them.

We’re all jumping around like psychos, cheering and dancing, because *we won* the wildest game ever. And our own all-star quarterback brought it home.

He fucking crushed it. There’s no other way to say it… I’m proud of him.

Don’t tell him I said that.

The rest of the team practically carries Kyran off the field after this monumental playoff win. He whips his helmet off, and his face is beaming. Pink cheeks and watering eyes. It’s pretty dope to see.

Removing the head of my costume, I rush up to him, grinning.

“I knew you could do it.” I pat him on the back, and he smiles, breathing heavily from all the adrenaline.

“Yea… thanks,” he replies softly, eyes flicking around to all the people shouting his name.

“Running *and* throwing? I guess you’re the whole package.” I brush my hair back from my sweaty forehead.

He grimaces at me, but it’s not really working to wipe away his permanent ecstatic grin. “It was only five yards…”

“Right.” I squint at him, and he chuckles. “Well, you did good. Big celebratory plans with the team, then?”

His smile fades a little, and he blinks at me. His lips part like he’s going to say something, but before he can, Guty and Theo gallop over, hanging all over him.

Guty slings an arm around Kyran’s shoulder. “Nueve! You are fucking *unstoppable*, kid!”

“What do you say we go get you some refreshments?” Theo grins at him.

Kyran peeks at me, for only a split second before turning back to them and smirking. “Sounds good.”

“It’s party time, baby!” Guty hollers, pointing to a few of the nearby cheerleaders. “I expect to see you ladies taking care of my man tonight!” He aims a knowing grin at Kyran and winks. “Only the best favors for All-star Harbor.”

Pursing my lips, I hold in my sarcastic remarks as best I can, shifting my weight to keep from feeling invisible in front of all these people who barely notice that I exist.

Theo shoots me a teasing look. “You coming to the party, Baldwin?”

I’m about to politely decline, when Kyran says, “It’s not really his scene. This party is team only.” I cock an insulted brow at him, but he’s already turning away with his friends. “Maybe next time, Eagle boy!”

Wow… really?? He just fucking snubbed me.

I scoff and roll my eyes to myself, playing it off like I don’t care. Because I *don’t*…

But swallowing feels sort of difficult right now. For some reason, my stomach is heavy and my chest is tight. I need to get the fuck out of this stupid costume.

I didn't want to go to his dumb party anyway. I'd rather drink Flavor-Aid in Jonestown.

But he didn't need to act like a dick about it…

Leaving the field, I make my way to the locker room. I usually get changed in a private bathroom in the back—*because God forbid I go anywhere near the players*. With every clomp of my giant bird feet, I'm grumbling to myself. *I can't believe I actually rooted for him. He's such an asshole…*

Seriously, all he cares about is winning so he can show off to his jock friends and the swarms of blonde bimbos who hang all over his broody ass.

His voice from the other night pops into my head… When he was telling me he couldn't get hard with Lexi.

It *should* make me feel better, but it doesn't. Still, I force myself to smirk at his misfortune, pulling a carefree grin and telling myself it doesn't matter. Because it *doesn't*.

He's not my friend. He's not even my *brother*… We're just coworkers. Tolerating one another for the sake of making money.

That's what I need to remember throughout whatever comes next. That's the *truth*.

Creeping into the locker room, I hear clamorous voices, showers running. I roll my eyes, rushing along the outer edge of the room as quickly as I can toward the bathroom. I'm not even paying attention, just trying to get through there without anyone spotting me.

Unfortunately, I come crashing right into a solid wall of damp muscle. And it doesn't take much assessing to realize that it's douchebag Number Nine. Wet from the shower, with only a towel wrapped around his waist.

"What the fuck…" he grunts, narrowing his hazel gaze. "Are you fucking following me??"

Shaking my head, I scoff at his audacity. "Could you be more conceited?? I'm going to change… Not everything is about you, Kyran."

"Whatever," he mumbles, jaw set visibly.

I go to move around him, but he moves in the same direction. I shift the other way, and he does the same. We literally can't get away from each other and it's really starting to piss me off.

"God, *move*," he huffs. "You and your stupid bird suit! Get out of my way!"

“You get out of *my* way,” I grumble, giving his chest a hard shove in my mitts.

He barely budges, but still… I don’t think he likes what I did.

His eyes harden, those stupid full lips sloped in a displeased line as he shoves me back. “Don’t fucking touch me, Avi.”

The weight of my giant costume causes me to stumble. And when I regain my footing, I’m seeing red.

Lunging forward, I grab his shoulders, pushing him backward. He staggers, his back hitting a wall of lockers with a grunt from his throat.

But I’m not done.

Crowding him is easy, what with the size of my costume. I get him wedged between me and the lockers, my chest heaving from within the suit. My skin is burning up, a bead of sweat trickling down my back while I quake with rage.

“You’re such a fucking prick, you know that?” I growl.

He lifts his hands and tries to push me away. But I pin them at his sides, and he whimpers. The sound shocks us both.

Kyran’s pupils dilate. The muscled wall of his chest is thumping with strong breaths, his pink lips parted and shivering as we both register how close we are, and how the fuming testosterone has somehow slipped into a confusing lust.

This always seems to happen to us. It’s like something about our molecules in close proximity melts hate into desire, and I just don’t get it. It makes no sense, but it feels *good*. And I hate that it does, because he’s such a raving jerk.

“Avi… let me go,” he rumbles, breathlessly.

“No,” I grunt. “Someone really needs to bring you down a peg.”

His eyes shift. There are voices coming from just the other side of these lockers. We’re tucked away in a corner, but his teammates are nearby. And for some unknown reason, it sends a thrill up my spine.

I’m baking inside my suit, our bodies sealed together with only this bird costume between us, and it’s driving me crazy, because I just *know* if our bare chests were together, I could feel his heart racing against me.

“G-get off me,” he stutters, lips trembling as my mouth inches over them.

I can’t help but notice the fight has seemingly left his words. And his actions.

He’s not pushing me away.

“Why do you have to be such an asshole…” I whisper, rhetorically, of course.

Because the next thing I know, my mouth is crashing into his.

Kyran mewls when my lips capture his, and I attack him with forceful kisses, immediately writhing myself into his sturdy frame. He’s resistant at first, head shaking as if to say *no*…

But his mouth is opening for me. His tongue is creeping up to graze mine in a timid swipe that sends a buzz of electric need between my legs.

I groan, as quietly as I can because there are people so close. The entire football team is in the showers, laughing and chatting on the other side of the room, fully unaware that their quarterback is kissing the mascot a few feet away. But the reality of the situation does nothing to dampen the mood. In fact, my dick is rock hard, trapped inside this ridiculous costume.

And as much as he seems terrified, his movements jittery and nervous, I think Kyran might be experiencing similar sensations. Panting and moaning softly into my mouth with our lips brushing and sucking, tongues lapping in a dangerous, forbidden rush.

Pressing my hips into his, he gasps as I grind my bird suit against his cock, writhing into him, desperate to feel him through the thick layers of fleece and polyester.

I think I can… Just barely. I feel the ghost of his shape on mine and I’m fucking throbbing for more.

Quickly whipping the mitts off my hands, I lift my fingers to his face, gripping his jaw and holding him in place to bruise his mouth with kisses, tugging his bottom lip between my teeth until he purrs. *Oh, baby… Feed me that sound…*

“Avi…” he breathes, so softly I can barely hear him. “Stop…”

“Shut up,” I groan, dizzy from the adrenaline and illicit yearn.

No one knows…

He’s mine, and no one knows it.

Clenching fistfuls of my costume at my sides, he dips his face away from the starved force of my lips. “This isn’t… p-part of the deal.” My cheek brushes his while I breathe in deep, reacquainting myself with reality. “Business only,” he stammers. “For the fans, remember?”

“Stop acting like you don’t want it,” I hum, watching his swollen lips quiver.

“I don’t,” he growls. But he’s still not shoving me away. Or punching me.

It surges me with triumphant confidence.

My eyes drift between us, finding that his towel has completely fallen off and is pooled around his feet. I slowly slip a hand down to his dick, fingers tracing its thick rigidity as he shudders.

“You’re a bad liar,” I murmur. “We both know this doesn’t want cheerleaders…”

“Ffuck off, Avi…” he whines.

Inching my lips up to his ear, I whisper, “I know your secret. You wanna be bent over and fucked by the *mascot*.”

Kyran shoves me off of him, bending and picking up his towel just as footsteps and voices are echoing closer. Stepping back, I give him a satisfied smirk while he fumbles to cinch the towel around his waist and cover his obvious erection. I chuckle, biting my lip, and he scowls.

“No amount of money in the world would make me want you,” he snarls, having snapped his wrath and denial back into place.

My head slants. “*Right*. We’ll see about that.”

“No, we won’t,” he hisses. “You’re just a dumbass in an eagle suit.”

“Hey, you just made out with this eagle.” I grin, and he growls.

He steps forward, face flushed. “You *attacked* me.”

“Oh, please.” I chuckle. “You could have pushed me away. But you didn’t…” I lean in closer to him. “Because you liked it. Just like you liked __”

“Alright, enough!” he barks as a few of his teammates are rounding the corner. Kyran glances at them, jumping back to put distance between us. “Fly away, loser. Back to your nest.”

He smirks at me like he’s proud of himself, and if I was a vindictive person, I would totally point out how desperate he was for this loser’s tongue in his mouth a minute ago.

But I won’t, because I don’t care enough. If Kyran wants to keep his hidden desires a secret, *fine*. If he feels like he needs to keep treating me like shit in front of his friends to make himself feel better, *great*.

As long as he keeps sneaking his straight *ass over to my place so we can keep making money, what do I care?*

I don’t. I don’t care.

Turning away from their laughter and mocking, I go into the bathroom to change out of this stupid costume. But when I’m all alone, with the echoes of sneers and hurtful words pulsing in my brain, convincing myself becomes just a little bit harder.

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

DinoDicks: Search my cave and paint the walls white
Inch3z_aplenty: You're both so f*cking hot, my zipper is falling for you
NotAStalker: I'd let you fold me like a cheap lawn chair.

"Eat ass, bitch," I grumble at the screen, my fingers working on the controller to smash a zombie's head open. I bash him repeatedly with a pipe until his skull explodes into a million pieces.

I chuckle. Because it's funny.

I'm playing *The Last of Us*. After that little *moment* in the locker room, I decided I just wanted to come back to the dorm and be alone, dodging texts from my mom about meeting up for a celebratory burger. I'm not sure if she meant just me… Or me and Kyran. But there's no way superstar would blow off a keg-sucking party filled with jocks and bimbos to hang out with his family anyway. And I'm just too tired.

Seriously, my eyes are closing while I'm playing, and by the third time I die because I'm half-conscious, I let them flutter shut and I end up passing out on the couch.

There's a buzzing on the edge of my brain. I can't tell if it's happening in real life or in my cluttered dreams. But then the sound of knocking fully wakes me up.

It's not *loud* knocking, but it's definitely incessant. Sitting up, I rub the sleep from my eyes, noting the time on the clock. Two-fifteen.

Padding over to the door, I use the peephole, because I'm not exactly sure who would be showing up at this ungodly hour. Although in the back of my mind, I know who it's going to be before I even look.

Of course it's Kyran. He's standing out there, knocking and knocking, while simultaneously typing on his phone.

Letting out a sigh, I open the door. "Really? It's the middle of the night, for fuck's sake…"

He pushes his way past me inside, shrugging out of his coat. "I tried texting you, but you weren't answering."

"Because I was *asleep*," I mutter pointedly, then cross my arms. "What do you want, Kyran?"

He blinks at me, as if he doesn't understand the question, and it brings me right back to the same level of frustration from earlier. It's annoying as fuck that he just shows up here in the middle of the night, in secret, after treating me like a nothing little loser in front of his friends. I don't know why I'm surprised, but it still irks me.

His eyes fall to his shoes, and I can't make myself ignore how his sandy-colored hair is more strewn about than he usually allows, and how pink his cheeks are from the cold.

Still, he's not speaking, and it's testing my patience. "Did you come here just to sway around in front of me, or is there something you need?"

His chin lifts until our eyes lock. "I… I'm not tired."

My forehead lines. "Okay…?"

"I just thought…" he starts, then clears his throat. "I thought maybe you'd want to… hang out."

I narrow my gaze at him. "You didn't think I was worthy of hanging out with earlier. What's different now? Oh, wait. I know. *Now* it's the middle of the night and your friends aren't around…"

He purses his lips. "Whatever, Avi. Don't act like you care. You've never been interested in hanging out with football players. I did you a favor."

"Thanks. You're a peach," I grumble sarcastically.

He's right. I *don't* care, about any of this. I shouldn't feel offended that he only shows up at night, and only comes to *hang out* when no one's around. Because that's the nature of this whole thing.

We're *not* friends. We're business acquaintances. *That's it.*

So I force down the strange, uneasy feelings trying to slink up into my chest, and I step closer to him. "I take it you couldn't get hard again… with your cheerleaders?"

His eyes narrow. "Fuck off. You don't know shit."

“Really?” I hum, and move in even closer, until our chests are almost flush, taking his chin between my fingers. “Were you thinking about our little secret in the locker room…?”

He slaps my hand away. “Back the fuck off, dipshit, or I’ll waste you.”

An easy smirk settles on my lips as I spin on my heel. “Fine. I’ll be in the bedroom whenever you’re ready to admit the *real* reason for your visit.”

Meandering away, I go to the bathroom real quick to freshen up. Because it’s only a matter of time before his stubbornness evaporates and he realizes that I’m right.

In my bedroom, I get the tripod set up and prepare my new video camera for optimal recording. I pick up my phone, checking it for a moment, only to find text notifications at the top. But I choose not to read them right now, focusing on perfecting the lighting.

Business. This is a job. I’m at work.

And I guess in this line of work, it’s totally acceptable to be getting a boner right now.

After a few minutes, I hear footsteps, and I cover up my triumphant grin with a sigh. *I love being right.…*

Turning to ask him a question, the words dissolve in my throat when I find him already undressed down to his boxer briefs. I can’t help but gulp.

Okay.… There’s his… body.

Kyran sidles over to my bed and crawls into it, lying down and letting out a shaky breath. “So… we’re gonna watch this before you post it, right? To make sure I—*we* don’t look… stupid?”

I nod, lashes fluttering as I try to remember how to speak. “Uh… yea. Totally. Whatever you want.”

Stupid. That was a stupid thing to say.

But he just nods in response, settling into my bed. His leg hits something, and he flinches, moving the comforter to reveal a sleeping kitten.

The look of horror on his face is pretty satisfying. “Can you move this thing??”

Chuckling, I step over and pick Robin up. “What’s wrong…? You don’t like cats?”

“No, actually. I don’t.” He pulls a displeased scowl at the cat while I dangle her in front of his face. “Get it away from me.”

“But she’s so cute!” I grin. “Just pet her one time.”

“No. Come on, Avi, stop fucking around,” he grunts, and I sigh.

“Fine.” I mutter to Robin, clear enough for him to hear. “I told you he’s a grouch.”

Bringing her to the living room, I get her snuggled up in her fuzzy blanket, then return to the bedroom. The lights are all dimmed, minus the one coming from the ring light on my tripod. Still, there’s a bit of ambience in here, which is good.

Nothing worse than doing something you’ve never done before in full brightness.

I think the fact that we’re about to have sex sets in when I press record, because my hands are suddenly all clammy and my stomach is twisting and turning like it’s doing the Harlem Shake. Rubbing my palms on my pants, I drop gently onto the bed by Kyran’s feet.

“So… how are we gonna do this?” I ask, unzipping my hoodie.

He watches my fingers drag the zipper down, eyes lingering on where the material hangs open until I shrug it off my shoulders.

“Um… I don’t know.” He starts to fidget nervously.

I like it. I don’t know why, but I do.

Slowly, I crawl over him, and his eyes widen. But to my surprise, his legs part like an instinct to make room for me.

“How about we call this a test run?” My hand slides up his abs, onto his chest, palm resting above where his heart is jumping aggressively. “Just to see… if it even works.”

Kyran swallows visibly, bringing my attention to his throat as he croaks, “Why wouldn’t it work?”

“I mean *us*,” I clarify, fighting against trembling eagerness. “Doing this… *together*. We don’t know what the chemistry is gonna be like…”

He still looks a little shaken by what I’m saying, but he nods, then peeks at the camera. Grasping his jaw, I tug him until he has to look at me.

“Forget about that,” I whisper, submitting to the hunger in me and lowering my mouth to his. “Focus on what we’re doing. And how it feels…”

A small gasp leaves his lips and I swallow it up. It tastes *fucking great*… Like cinnamon booze and secret lust. Parting my lips slowly over his, I suck on his lower, kissing him gently until I can’t help but hum. *How can his awful mouth turn so sweet…?*

Kyran is stiff at first, as usual. But when my lips part wider, his follows my lead, and I glide my tongue inside to touch his.

God, it wasn't a fluke. It feels every bit as good as it did in the bathroom at the party. Only this time, we're both half-naked. And alone… And he's in my bed, squirming beneath me while his big cock turns to stone under mine.

My hands are on his face and in his hair, holding him in place as sensual kisses bloom into a carnal chase, panting and the sounds of blankets rustling filling the air around us. Gliding my fingertips down, I caress his hard surfaces, the curves of muscle in his chest and his abs, before slipping them into the waistband of his boxers.

He flinches, tensing as I begin to gradually pull them down.

"W-wait… Avi…" he murmurs into my mouth.

"Wait for what?" I breathe, already burning alive and we've barely done anything yet.

"Just… I don't…" he stammers, lips quivering like the sexiest, most timid angry boy I've ever met. "I don't know if I… can do this."

Forcing my lips off of his, I peer down at him. "Do you want me to stop?" My fingers brush along his erection, and he whimpers. "Or are you just pretending again?"

His chest bumps mine, as he breathes heavily, biting his lip. It takes him a second, but he whispers, "I don't want to stop…"

"Good." I kiss the words onto his soft, fluttering mouth. "Me neither."

Continuing with my removal of his clothes, I slide his boxers down, and he actually lifts his hips so I can get them off. Then he pushes my sweats down, and I kick them away, leaving us fully naked and my body… between his legs.

"Ky," I hum, sucking on his puffy lips. "Did you already get off tonight?"

"Why does it matter?" he grunts, trailing curious fingers along my chest to trace my pectorals. "Are you jealous?"

"No," I rumble. *I'm not.* "I just don't want to be getting some ditz's sloppy seconds."

His jaw clenches as he glares up at me. "But it's just business, right…? So what difference does it make?"

He has a point. I don't even know why I'm asking him this stuff.

“Prime recording time is when you’re all wound up and needing a release,” I breathe over his mouth. “That’s what the fans want to see…” *That’s what I want.*

Kyran’s face flushes. “I haven’t been with anyone, okay? Can we just… do this?”

My hand squeezes his hip as I drag my aching cock along his. “Tell me you want it.”

“Fuck you, Avi,” he growls, and my limbs tremor with the thrill that always comes from fighting with him. I don’t understand it, but it lights me the fuck up. “You know why we’re doing this…”

“Tell me…” I lower my lips to his jaw and bite him. “Or you don’t get what you came for.”

He hums like he’s fighting for irritation, but the feel of our heated flesh and stiff cocks rocking together, my teeth nipping his sensitive skin, has arousal winning out.

He whispers, “I want to feel you—*it*.” He corrects himself quickly, then clears his throat, his whispers taking on a nervous shake. “Just… fuck me, Avi. I want you to… fuck me.”

That’s what I wanted to hear.

Humming, satisfied and so fucking ready, I drop more slow kisses on his mouth, biting his lips while reaching for the lube I stashed beneath my pillow. I drag the bottle down his arm to his hand while we grind our big, swollen dicks together, ragged breathing becoming the perfect soundtrack for this illicit moment.

“I want you to do it,” I tell him, working my mouth down to his throat so I can nip that precious Adam’s apple. “Make us both wet.”

Kyran’s hands are shaking so bad, he can barely hold the bottle. But he gets there, uncapping it and squeezing some lube onto his fingers. Honestly, I think I might love how afraid he is…

This is a guy who thrives under pressure. Who whips balls fifty yards while fifty thousand people scream around him. He’s not easily shaken. Yet doing this, with *me*, turns him into a twitchy, uncool… *virgin*, I guess, for lack of a better word.

I’m kind of obsessed with it.

Exploring his chest with my mouth, I flick my tongue over his nipple, sucking it between my lips until his hips buck and he purrs.

There’s that noise again… Fuck me sideways.

“How’s that feel?” I ask, lapping at his pebbled flesh some more, pulling and sucking it into a sexy little point that’s dripping with my saliva.

“God… *good*,” he hums, reaching for my cock with his lubed hand. “It feels *so* good… I didn’t know that would feel—uhhmf… *good*.”

A smirk graces my lips. *He’s so fucking cute.*

God, help me.

Moving over to the other one, I repeat the lustful torture, sucking *harder*, latching onto his nipple and tugging it with my teeth until he’s moaning out the sweetest sounds I’ve ever heard. His fist wraps around my cock and he strokes it slowly with a firm grip to match the painful pleasure my mouth is giving his chest. He covers my length in lube from tip to balls, jerking me so good I’m leaking on him.

“Put some in your ass,” I whisper, and his hand slows. “The lube… Get your hole nice and wet for me, baby.”

“What did I say about *baby*…” he growls, hooded eyes glaring at me while he squirts more lube onto his fingers.

I pout. “But I like it.”

“I don’t care what you like,” he huffs. “I’m not some girl, Avi. I’m a fucking *man*.”

I can’t help but chuckle. “So guys can’t be called *baby*?”

“No,” he insists firmly.

“Why not?”

“Because I said so.”

“Well, what am I supposed to call you then…?” I bite my way down his abs until his cock is right by my face.

Peering up at him, I give it a nice lick, lapping at the taste of his arousal as it seeps from the head. His lashes flutter, eyes falling shut while I wrap my lips around his cock and suck just enough to have him melting beneath me.

I know I’ve never sucked any other dicks before, but I *really* like his. I love the fact that it’s uncut… The foreskin is so fun to play with, and when I push it with my tongue, his whole body trembles.

“Just call me… ah, *fuck*, that feels good…” He rambles nonsense, fingers brushing through my hair. “Call me by my name, you unbearable nuisance.”

I pop off his dick to laugh softly. “I’m gonna call you whatever the fuck I want, *superstar*. Get used to it.”

“Fuck you…” he breathes, returning to his task of lubricating himself.

This one’s a bit trickier… Because it’s clear he’s never touched his own ass before. He’s a *macho, manly football player, bro.* They don’t play with their assholes.

Except that I’m sure they *do*, because it feels good, hence why the second Kyran’s fingers slip behind his nuts, his eyes flutter shut again, and he lets out a quiet mewl he tries to cover up with more throat clearing.

Positioning myself between his legs, I grip his thighs, pushing them open wide and lifting him enough to see what he’s doing. His fingers are sort of swirling around and around on his hole, and as hypnotizing as it is to watch, he needs to slip one inside before I combust.

“Do you have to watch me like that?” he grunts.

“Yes, because you’re not doing it right.” I grab his hand and use it to probe his ass with his own finger.

“*Fffuck*,” he gasps, his entire body flushing as I help him finger himself.

Opening the lube, I squirt some more onto us both, stroking my erection slippery with my other hand.

“That’s cold, you bitch,” he shivers.

“Just for a second,” I mumble, guiding his finger in up to his knuckle. “Are you relaxed enough yet? I have to get inside you before I die…”

He bites his lip, chewing on it for a moment before he murmurs, “Yea… mhm.” He nods. “I think… I am.”

I release his hand, wedging myself between his legs. Hovering over him, I press a slow kiss on his mouth and breathe, “For the fans?”

“For the fans.”

Gripping my cock, I aim the head, nudging it between his cheeks. He’s immediately trembling, most likely from all the nervous anticipation I can feel radiating between the two of us like scorching electric waves. When my crown pushes up to his hole, I’m met with resistance.

“Relax for me,” I croon, moving my mouth down to his ear to suck on the lobe the way he likes.

It gets his muscles to ease up just enough, and I give him a gentle shove, urging just the tip of my cock into his ass as easily as I can manage when all I want is to fucking *plunge* myself in.

Kyran’s face contorts in discomfort, but he doesn’t tell me to stop. He simply chomps down on his lower lip to contain the whining noises, digging his fingers into my chest while he struggles to relax.

Sucking on his ear some more, I hum, “You already feel incredible…” Hoping the praise will help. Which it does.

His body eases up even more, enough for me to keep nudging, and before I know it, the entire swollen curve of my head slips inside him.

“Ahh-*vee*,” he cries a soft and strangled version of my name, fingers launching into my hair to tangle in it.

“That okay, sexy?” I push in a little more, just an inch, while he breathes like he’s fighting through the burn of wide penetration.

I knew my two fingers weren’t exactly a proper match for the size of my dick… And now I feel bad because he’s practically choking. But he’s still not telling me to stop. He’s yanking my hair and whimpering… But his dick is engorged beyond belief, leaking out so much precum it looks like he had a mini orgasm.

“Ohh*fuuck*me…” His words melt together as they pour from his mouth. And then his hips wiggle. Just a little… But it’s enough for me to tell that he likes it.

“Want more?” I ask hoarsely while sucking his ear, biting his neck, driving my cock deeper into the sweetest, tightest, searingly hot place ever created.

There’s no *possible* way I could have prepared for what this would feel like. It’s earth-shattering. With only about half my dick inside him, I’m buzzing all over and seeing fucking *stars*.

“*Fuck*, Avi…” he rasps through quivering lips. “Fffuuck, you have no idea… how this… *feels*.”

“So you’re glad I’m fucking you, then?” I grin on his sticky flesh, pumping my cock in deeper, and *deeper*, dragging back just a bit, then gliding in some more.

“Don’t push it,” he growls. But then his head tips back on the pillow and he gasps, “Holy fuck, oh my *God*.”

Shoving into him the rest of the way, I pause to marvel at where we’re connected, and his cheeks resting on my pelvis. It’s the most incredible sight of my life… My *eyes* could come, if that were possible.

Running my hand down, I brush my fingers along his balls and he mewls.

“So… *deep*,” he yammers. “You’re… so fucking deep.”

“I know… It’s amazing.” I draw my hips back, then push in again.

Kyran’s eyes roll back in his head. “Fffuck, *Avi*, that was it…”

“Right here?” I barely move, and he shudders again.

“Yes! *Yes, yes*… oh God, don’t stop.”

Those damn words turn me into a fucking *machine*.

Totally done with the warm-ups, I begin to move in him, rocking my hips to massage my cock with the unbelievable tightness of his ass. I’m keeping a leisurely pace, because honestly it feels amazing this way. No need to fuck hard or fast when his body is gripping me like a scorching hot fist. Grabbing his hands in mine, I slap them onto my ass, and he takes over, squeezing me while I pump my cock in him over and over.

“*Fuck*, baby, you feel so good.” I drop my mouth to his, kissing him and swallowing up his sounds. “The way your greedy little ass swallows my dick is… fucking *euphoric*.”

Rising just a bit, I grip his chest, playing with his nipples while I ride his hole, slow, but deep, aiming for his prostate as best I can, even though I don’t know exactly where it is. But I can tell when I hit it because he cries out garbled versions of my name and his thick, pink cock leaves a puddle on his abs.

Kyran’s ankles lock atop my ass, holding me to him as my thrusts pick up, my lancing into him becoming ravenous. His body is jerking up and down, the bed thumping against the wall. I’m sure we should probably be quieter, but I can’t even help it.

I’m *lost*… High as fuck on this hot, slippery, forbidden sex I’m having with my stepbrother. The dude who hates me… who’s *never* liked me, not even a little… is letting me tear his ass *apart* right now.

And my balls are so tight, throbbing so hard, I think I’m about to come.

“Avi…” he whimpers, strangled and breathless, like I’m driving all the air out of his lungs. “Avi Avi *Avi*… Why do you fuck *so good*…?”

My head is spinning, pulse pounding, dick leaking inside him as I drop my mouth to his. “Because… I’ve always wanted to fuck you in the ass.”

He cries and his hole clenches on my cock. “Yea…?”

“Yea…” I breathe in between sucking and biting his lips, pinching his nipples with my fingers and slamming my cock into his warm, tight, dripping wet ass, hard enough to grace us with that salacious slapping sound. “Gorgeous, sexy, *awful* human being… your ass feels like heaven, baby.”

“Are you… gonna come in me?” He chokes out the words, aiming a dazed gaze up at me. He’s all hooded eyes, blushed pink cheeks, and

swollen lips.

I nod fast. “*Yes*. I’m gonna pour every pulse of my orgasm inside you, Ky.”

His dark lashes flutter as his hands fly up to my face, pulling my mouth to his. “*Fuck*, I’m gonna come. Avi, I’m *coming*.”

He says the words like he’s shocked that it’s happening, followed immediately by harsh sobs and fast, warm pulses of slick cum hitting me in the abs.

“Fuck me, that’s so fucking sexy,” I gasp. “Spray me down, Kyran. Soak me…”

He whines, but my hips don’t stop. I ride him through it, fucking the cum out of him until I can’t hold it for one more second. Chills sheet my sticky hot flesh as my balls nearly burst, streams of my orgasm throbbing as deep inside him as I can get.

“Baby, I’m coming inside you. I’m coming in your ass…” I breathe the gravelly words into his mouth, sucking and biting his lips, fisting his hair, writhing our sweat-and-cum-slicked bodies together while I fuck us through mutually mystifying pleasure.

I don’t even know what I’m doing… If this is what I should be doing or not, but I don’t care. It feels like I’m *claiming* him; leaving my mark. Stuffing my dick in him so deep, my nuts are about to slip inside while I feed his ass every single drop until I’m fucking spent.

I might have blacked out.

But when I come to, we’re kissing. Softly, passionately panting together… surviving on one other’s exhales. His hands are gripping my chest and mine are on his face, in his hair. And we’re kissing so hard and needy, my lips have gone numb.

“Ky…” I whisper his name on a groan in between sounds of wet suction.

“Yea?” His fingers drag over my pecs like he can’t get enough; can’t stop touching and feeling. He’s all sensation, and I get it.

So am I.

“That was the best sex of my life,” I purr on his mouth, my hips gradually stroking in him some more, because it still feels incredible, and I don’t want to stop. I want to stuff my cum *deeper*. I want to *live* moving in him like this.

Our kisses slow to a halt, and I inch back to stare down at him. I just have to take this in… The starry-eyed fascination on his face. He looks like a completely different person right now.

I know it won't last. In the blink of an eye, he'll be back to regular old Kyran; my mean, grouchy stepbrother. He'll remind me that we're doing this for the money, and I'll agree.

But right now, just for a moment, I have to stare… to savor this version of him.

Grabbing his hand in mine, I use his fingers to swipe through the cum on his abs. Then I bring them up to his mouth. And to my surprise, he parts his lips, allowing me to push them inside. He sucks the cum off, and I pull them back, licking up the rest before kissing him again, filthy and fucking *full*.

After a moment, we pry apart, and we both blink. Somehow sharing the same thought, our heads turn slowly to the tripod where my camera is recording.

Oh yea… Totally forgot about that.

Kyran clears his throat, face flushing an even deeper red as he starts to squirm.

"I'm gonna pull out…" I murmur. Not sure why… Maybe I just feel like he needs to be walked through this, because he looks a little terrified again.

Tugging my dick out of him slowly, he groans and bites his lip, wincing as he props up on his elbows. And I'm staring at my cum as it drips from his ass. Fucking *wild*.

Reacquainting myself with reality, I hop up on legs like jelly, rushing to shut the camera off.

Kyran is staring down his frame, gawking like he's never seen it before. Like in one of those *Freaky Friday* situations where you wind up in someone else's body…

Slinking back to the bed, I sit down next to him, trailing my fingers over his shoulder. "Do you want to take a shower?" His eyes spring to mine. "Alone, I mean. Not like… *with* me." I breathe out steadily and shake my head. "I'm just saying, if you want to take a shower, you can."

He stares at me for a moment before nodding. "Yea… Thanks. I think that would be…" His gaze falls to the puddle of cum between his legs, and he gulps the word, "Helpful."

Sliding off the bed, he trots, walking sort of awkwardly toward the bathroom. He goes inside and closes the door… But I don't hear the distinct click of the lock. Which is interesting.

"God, what the fuck…" I shake my head.

Deciding that I need to move, to distract myself from thinking about the insanity of my first time having sex with a man, who also happens to be my stepbrother, I flit around, busying myself with cleaning up. But the whole time I'm stripping off my sheets and replacing them with clean ones, I'm so very *aware* of Kyran's presence. I hear the shower running, and I just can't help but wonder what would happen if I went in there…

If I got in and stood behind him with the water running over our bodies. If I wrapped my arms around his waist, and maybe… kissed his neck a little.

Fuck, man. I am so screwed.

Why am I thinking about this??

Shut it down, Avi. Lock it up in the safe and forget the combination.

He's in the shower for a solid half-hour, and I can't stop picturing him sitting on the floor in there, hugging his knees to his chest. I guess my first time having gay sex has turned me into a total nut job, because by the time he emerges, with fresh skin and wet hair all tousled about, I have to actively keep reminding myself to calm the hell down.

Kyran pads quickly over to the rest of his clothes and gets dressed while I just flutter in the middle of the room.

"So… When do you want to watch it?" I ask, and he peeks at me. "You know, to make sure it… came out good?"

He chews on his lip for a few seconds before muttering, "I think it came out fine. I don't want to watch it…"

My brow furrows. "Are you sure? You were pretty gung-ho before…"

"Yea, well, I changed my mind," he snaps.

"Okay…" I hold my hands up. "Sorry."

He huffs out a tired breath. "It's just… late. I'm exhausted, and I don't feel like watching gay porn right now."

My lips twitch. "I didn't say we had to watch it *right now*…"

"Fine. I guess you can send it to me." He rubs the back of his neck. "Maybe I'll watch it tomorrow. After the dust has… settled."

The dust has settled?? What the hell does that even mean?

I take a few slow steps over to him, and he backs up. I roll my eyes. “Are you freaking out?”

“No. I’m not *freaking out*,” he grumbles. “I’m *fine*. I’m just tired. I played the most intense game of my career tonight.” His eyes flick to the clock. “Well, technically, last night. Jesus, it’s almost four a.m. I gotta go.”

Nodding, I step in front of him as he goes for his coat.

He huffs and blinks hard. “Avi, please don’t fuck with me right now. I’m tired.”

“I’m not fucking with you, I just…” Pausing, I consider what I’m trying to say. “I want to make sure you’re alright.”

His jaw ticks. “Yea, I’m fucking *peachy*. I just had secret gay sex with my stepbrother. I’m living the dream.” Grabbing his coat, he whips it on like he’s having some sort of tantrum.

“Kyran… It’s okay to be bi, you know…” I murmur, curling my face to try to meet his eyes.

He glares at me. “I’m not *bi*, I’m *broke*. And the sooner you get that through your head, the better off we’ll all be.”

Okay… and we’re back to asshole Kyran. Great. Love that guy.

Stepping dramatically aside, I hold my arm out, gesturing to the door. “You’ve made your point, dickhead. Have a great night.”

He nods at me, standing still for only another moment before he stomps past me.

“Congrats on the game, by the way,” I mumble sarcastically, rolling my eyes at his back.

He pauses and turns around, staring at me. I stare back at him. And we stare at each other in silence for a solid five seconds, during which no one speaks and I’m wondering why the hell he isn’t just *leaving* if he can’t wait to get away from me.

His lips part. Then they close. Then they part. Then close again. He takes a step forward, then a step back.

What the fuck is he doing… Dancing?? Is he waiting for me *to do something??*

Finally, he breathes out a long exhale and bites his lip. Inching over hesitantly, he kisses me on the jaw and mumbles, “I’ll text you.”

Then he spins and darts out of the dorm room like he just dropped a bomb on my face.

I stand in that one spot for far too long, gaping at the door. When I eventually wade through my state of bewilderment, my hand lifts to my face, fingers brushing my jaw.

What the hell was that…?

Blinking out of it, I wander into the bathroom and take a shower. I'm in there until the water runs cold, my mind whirling through images that are now accompanied by hectic sensations. Once I'm out and dressed, I fidget near my video camera.

I should wait to watch the video… Wait until the *dust* has *settled*.

What the fuck dust needs to settle, anyway?? It's sex.

We had sex. That's it. No dust.

Sure, it was both of our first times doing it with a guy, but it doesn't have to *mean* anything. It's just physical, and it's for money.

So then why can't I stop thinking about his lips on my goddamn jaw??

I'm way too wired now to fall back to sleep. Grabbing the bowl I keep in my nightstand packed with an indica that works to relax my mind, I take a couple of hits, pressing play on our cherry-popping video.

And my eyes are instantly wide, because it looks… Well, there's no other way to put it. It looks fucking *bonkers*.

From the start, it's like we weren't recording at all. It's just chemistry, from the first kiss, to the first moment I push inside him, to the way his toes curl in his socks—*yes, he apparently left his socks on… I hadn't even noticed*—right before he starts to come.

It doesn't look like porn… Because it's *real*. Like a hidden camera capturing two stepbrothers succumbing to mutual, lust-drunk desire.

Whether or not that's what it actually is remains to be seen. But the fact is that this video we just made is by far the hottest thing I've ever watched with my own two eyes.

Goddamn… It literally looks like I'm making love to him.

I'm not sure how Kyran is going to react to seeing this, but I know without a shred of doubt that the fans are going to blow their lids. Hell, my cock is rock solid myself, and I'm *in* the video.

You'd think watching a video of yourself fucking would be embarrassing or contain at least a moment or two that makes you cringe. An awkward facial expression or a weird noise. But this one has none of that… From start to finish, it's fucking *fire*.

Breathing out slowly, I stop it at the part where I'm watching cum seep from his ass. I grab my phone, making a mental note to incorporate some POV shots next time when I notice the texts from earlier. From Kyran.

Tapping on them, I tug my lip between my teeth.

Kyran: Hey…

Kyran: Are you up?

Kyran: Ok that sounds booty-callish. Sorry I was just wondering if you're awake…

Kyran: Can I come over? This party is dumb and I was thinking about what you said…

Kyran: About the jackpot.

Kyran: Whatever. I decided that I might want to… So can I see you?

Kyran: Avi… Are you ignoring me?

Kyran: I'm here

Kyran: I'm outside. Let me in.

Kyran: Don't be a dick just open the fucking door

Kyran: I'm sorry about the locker room…

Kyran: You were right ok? I liked it…

Kyran: Do I need to say the magic words or something?? Jesus… I want you to fuck me Avi. Ok?? Satisfied?? Open the fucking door

Kyran: Wow that was stupid. Delete that text please.

And that was the last message… The one he was sending when I came to the door.

Swallowing feels exceptionally difficult as I stare at the phone screen, biting away the smile that's trying to cross over my lips.

This thing was already complicated as fuck before. But now, with these stupid butterflies bounding around in my gut, it's just turned into the biggest mess of my life.

He bottomed… But I feel like I'm the one who's *fucked*.

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

hambrienta4_cream: plezz lemme lick it clean
loveuNOT: dont know how I ended up on my knees with my mouth open but I did
hat3_s3x_is_th3_b3st_s3x: You guys >>>>> anyone else

Kyran

I'm uncomfortable.

I mean like really, very *wildly* uncomfortable as I click on the video attachment, my stomach going full Twister at the notion of what I'm about to see.

A video of me having sex… with a man.

More specifically, a video of me losing my butt virginity to my *stepbrother*… For *money*.

I'm still not sure this is even real. I might be wandering lost in some warped other dimension.

Goddamnit… Now I'm starting to sound like him too. I knew this was a bad idea.

The video begins to play, and my heart is lurching up my throat, my eyes widening as the formerly empty bed is suddenly filled by me and Avi. We start kissing, and he's touching me, and I'm forcing myself not to squirm in discomfort here and now, because I need to watch this. You know, to make sure it's up to my standards.

Regardless, the video is overwhelming enough that I'm contemplating turning it off. I mean… look at us. *What are we doing??*

Look at the way his hands are tracing the curves of my muscles… Look at the way mine are doing the same to his… It's as baffling as it is

concerning, because we don’t even look like *us* right now. We look like two totally different people.

Two people I don’t know… Two people who appear very, *very* into each other.

The video gets going, with Avi’s mouth on me and my fingers slicked with lube, and I can’t stop fidgeting because my dick is currently filling between my legs and I don’t want it to.

I’ve never watched gay porn before. I’ve watched straight porn, sure, but even in the homemade videos on Pornhub, I don’t remember seeing anything so sensual, while also dirty, sordid, and *real*.

He has my back arching off the bed. Lips shivering. Eyes rolling back in my skull. *I mean, when does that ever happen??*

The only reason I even know this is *me* in this video is because, unfortunately, I can still feel him tearing into me; stretching my body to fit him like a glove, his pelvis grinding on my balls, sinking so deep inside, I swear I could feel him touching my tonsils.

It’s been days since it happened, and I feel him *everywhere*. Which is not a good thing. Because it’s supposed to just be business; a job that I’m doing strictly for the cash. But I don’t know anyone in the world who loves their job that much…

With some stranger who looks like me crumbling to orgasm on the screen, I slap my laptop shut with a huff. “Fuck it.” I reach down and adjust my dick, which is trying to burst out of my pants.

The video is fine. Its only factors of humiliation lie within the details no one knows… That I’m not gay, and the dude who came in my ass is my stepbrother and my least favorite person on the planet.

The fans will like it. *Chemistry on point.…*

Reaching deep within myself for all the denial I can muster, I pick up my phone and text Avi.

Me: Post it.

He texts back after only a few seconds.

Avi: *thumbs up emoji*

Avi: It’ll just take me a few minutes for edits, then it’ll be available for PPV

Avi: Gotta fuzz out you screaming my name :-P

Ugh.

Me: Cool.

Avi: Have you given any more thought to what we talked about?

I roll my eyes at the phone screen.

Avi called me yesterday to talk *logistics*. Actually, he called me four times in a row, because the first three times I ignored his calls. But he wore me down, as is apparently very easy for him to do, a fact that I don't understand or want to think about.

He insisted that I create an anonymous Twitter account to help promote the OnlyFans collaborations. Naturally, I said no at first. But I'm learning that he can be awfully demanding, and for some unknown reason, I constantly find myself bending to him.

I'm telling myself it's just about the money… But lying in bed at night, over the past few weeks since we started this little venture, the hidden thoughts creep to the surface.

Something about him taking control settles me, on a deep, emotional level I'm not at all equipped to deal with, let alone make space in my mind for *Avi* to be the person sitting next to me on this plane as it spirals in a downward trajectory, headed straight for impending doom.

In the interest of getting him off my back—figuratively, I guess… *God, help me*—I pull up Twitter on my phone and whip together a quick profile. I have a Twitter account, but I never use it. I only made it because of the hype when the app first started, before I realized everyone on there was pretty… obnoxious. But I guess it's the best place to promote online sex work, because of the lack of censorship.

There's a porn side of Twitter I never knew about until Avi showed me his account. The kind of stuff that would make Mark Zuckerberg wet his tighty-whities.

Apparently, Elon Musk has a different set of guidelines.

Anyway, this is a new account, specifically for this purpose. No faces. I'm just using a shirtless selfie as a profile picture.

And despite how little I want to do this, my lips curl into a satisfied smirk as I choose my username.

Not_Your_Baby.

Take that, ***Backwardz_Cap****, you smug bastard.*

I follow Avi, and before I can even send him my handle, he texts me.

Avi: Really?

Avi: Not_Your_Baby…

My grin is nearly breaking my face, toes wiggling triumphantly. Until only a minute later, he sends me a picture. And my face falls.

It's a GIF… of us fucking. He actually *made a GIF* from our video, of the exact moment when his dick makes me come, and my toes are curling in the socks I apparently forgot to take off. And the text caption on the GIF reads, *Sure looks like you're my baby.*

I delete the message fast. Not like it matters, because if anyone got ahold of my phone, there's enough incriminating stuff in here to put my whole shameful side hustle on blast.

Me: Fuck off

He sends it again.

Goddamnit! I delete it again.

But he just keeps sending them, and now I'm scrambling to delete these ridiculous GIF messages as fast as he's sending them, seething while I do.

Thank God Guty is at the gym right now. The last thing I need is him peeking over my shoulder and seeing this shit.

Me: Alright ENOUGH!

Avi: hehe

Me: Cut the shit and tell me what you want me to do with this stupid fucking account

Avi: I'm uploading the video to OF now. Then I'm gonna tweet a teaser that you can retweet.

Me: Fine.

Avi: So… should I plan on seeing you tonight for more… business?

My stomach bunches up just from reading the words on the screen. It's almost like I can hear him saying them out loud, and it's twisting me into a knot.

I hate knots. Straight lines are all I need to concern myself with.

Me: No.

Avi: *pouty face emoji* Why not?

Me: Because I'm leaving for Arizona in the morning and I don't have time to deal with you

Avi: But wouldn't you be so much less stressed about the playoffs if you got some more of this dick that makes you come cross-eyed?

A tiny, completely ludicrous noise comes flying out of my throat willy nilly, and I bite my lip. Clenching my teeth together, I shift over the buzzing in my balls and angrily type out a message.

Me: Fuck off Avi. The only thing I need from you is money. Got it??

He doesn't reply for a full minute. And when he finally does, it's just a GIF of Oscar the Grouch popping out of his trash can.

Rolling my eyes, I stuff my phone away, getting up and stomping into my room for my gym bag. There's too much nonsense piling up in my head, too much irritation and confusion I refuse to think about fizzling in my veins.

I need to go work out. Get my head back on football and nothing else.

After all, none of this other bullshit means anything if I don't win these games, and help my team bring home a championship.

Leaving my dorm, I brave the frigid air of December, walking over to Fish Field House. It's the building where all of our training and practice goes down. The gym in here is pretty decent. Sometimes we'll use the rec center, but being that we're in the middle of playoffs and leaving for an away game in the morning, I'm sure most of my teammates will be here.

Popping in my earbuds and grabbing my water bottle, I lock my stuff up in one of the lockers and head into the gym. Just like I thought, a lot of the guys are here right now, and they nod at me upon my entrance. Some of them shout things my way, but we don't engage in any conversation. I think they can tell by my demeanor that I'm not in the mood for chitchat, which is a good thing.

Getting set up on one of the leg machines, I glance around the open space. I don't see Theo or Guty anywhere, which is weird because I thought they said they were coming down. *Maybe they're swimming…*

My playlist pumps steady beats in my ears, and I breathe through the weight, zoning out and focusing on the burn. I do this for a while, moving around the room to different leg machines, because it's leg day. Then I make my way over to the big wall mirror, staring at myself for a few seconds before I grab a medicine ball.

I'm bending at the waist, doing squats and watching the way my muscles flex and glisten, the strength pushing through the pain, when something moves in my peripheral. I stop to brush an errant strand of hair from my face, my eyes locking on a mystery form who just walked into the room.

I didn’t catch his face because he’s weaving in between machines, but he’s wearing gray sweatpants and a tank top, the way a certain someone is always dressed when I visit him in his dorm.

Shaking that away, I suck in a breath, preparing to go down again as my eyes narrow at the dude’s tattoos on his arm… The olive complexion of his skin.

Oh, no fucking way…

The guy steps aside, revealing a backwards Yankees cap covering a wild mane of dark hair, and a wicked grin.

I drop the medicine ball with a thud. “Fuck…” I grumble, having just narrowly avoided crushing my foot.

But I can’t even think about that right now. Because Avi is here, in *my* gym, entering my personal space.

He starts speaking, but my music is too loud and I can’t hear him. Pausing the track, I glare at him, jaw straining from the aggravation of seeing him in a place that’s supposed to be a safe haven from his bullshit.

“What the fuck are you doing here??” I hiss, my eyes flinging around to make sure no one’s watching us. Of course they are.

All eyes are on us right now.

“You know, I’ve never been in here before?” Avi sighs, his head pivoting around as he takes in the gym. Then his eyebrow cocks. “The rec center is way nicer…”

“Shut up,” I bark, and his face slowly tilts in my direction, gaze narrowing. “This place is for athletes only. How’d you even get in here anyway?”

“I’m part of the team.” He shrugs casually, smirk widening into a shit-eating grin that makes me want to punch him.

“*No*… you’re *not*,” I rumble firmly. “You’re the mascot. Mascots don’t do anything.”

He scoffs. “You think those dance moves just *happen*??”

Raking my fingers through my sweat-dampened hair, I close my eyes and take a breath, trying to calm the hell down before I blow a gasket. “Avi… You need to leave. You have no business being here.” I pin him with a look. “Do you even work out?? I’ve never seen it happen in all the years I’ve known you…”

“Yes, I work out.” He rolls his eyes petulantly. “I just don’t make a habit of doing it in front of other people like I have something to prove.” His lips

curl. “Or standing in front of a mirror so I can stare at myself while I lift.”

My fists tighten at my sides. “I’m not lifting… I’m doing squats.”

“Ooh,” he hums quietly. “Sounds like it might be fun to watch.”

“Fuck. Off,” I growl in his face, stepping closer to get my point across. “I need you to leave right now before I pummel your face like a speed bag.”

His head tilts, displaying just how unaffected he is by my threats. It fucking enrages me, because the truth of the matter is… *Can you really be intimidated by someone who’s willfully taken your load in their ass?*

A harsh shiver runs through me at the thought, but I force myself to push past it. That is irrelevant. Avi’s never been afraid of me or my threats. *Us fucking has zero to do with it.*

It is, however, making it even more difficult to be around him than usual. I just can’t stop remembering that video… The way it looked when those two people snapped their bodies together, like missing puzzle pieces.

The way I can still feel his quivers and quakes as he moved inside me…

The look on his face when I kissed him on the jaw.

This entire endeavor has become so horribly complicated, because I *hate* this person. I swear I do, yet now, I have all these memories of doing things with him that I… really didn’t hate.

I’ve gotta get him out of here. There’s no way I’ll be able to concentrate with him around.

“Please, Avi…” I whisper through gritted teeth. “Just go.”

“I can’t go,” he sighs, tapping his hand on my hip as he turns away. “It’s leg day.”

He shoots me a wink, and I’m fucking fuming. I think I’m actually turning the color of a tomato from rage.

Using my best skills in distraction and avoidance, I go back to my workout, though the whole time, I’m acutely aware of his presence in the room. And I feel like everyone else is also staring at him, wondering why the hell he’s here, which is just stressing me out even more.

I manage to make it through my next few sets, but I can feel Avi the way you can feel a storm in your bones; a persistent ache that just won’t go away. My eyes keep slinking over to him against my will, watching him use the same machines I’d been using, at the same weight and doing so without a visible ounce of struggle.

I don’t understand how he’s possibly in such good shape. It doesn’t make any sense. *Why does he need to have a body like that anyway?? He*

doesn't do *anything.*

The only parts of his body he uses are his hands for drawing and rolling joints, and his giant mouth for talking shit.

And I guess his dick for… Well, yea.

There's no hope of focusing on anything while my idiot stepbrother is around. Especially when he prances over to my side of the room and starts doing deadlifts only a few feet from where I'm stretching.

"Your form is off," I grumble, and he peeks at me, frowning. I roll my eyes and step over to him, placing a hand on his lower back. "You need to straighten your spine, or you'll hurt yourself."

Avi gives me one of his doe-eyed looks he sometimes gets when he's confused. It makes him look like a cartoon character, settling a strange sensation in my gut that I'm choosing to interpret as irritation.

Keeping my hand on his back, I tell him, "Here. Try it again."

He does so, bending his knees while I bend a bit to keep my hand in place. When he comes back up, I nod.

"A little better." I smirk. "I felt you shaking… That too much weight for you to handle?"

He blinks at me and licks his lip. "I don't think that was why…"

My brows furrow together, and it finally dawns on me that I'm touching him. I whip my hand away quick, stepping back. "Just… be careful. You could fuck your back up if you don't do it right."

Avi's lips twitch at the corner. "Are you saying you… don't want me to get hurt?"

I squint and scowl. "I don't care."

He inches closer to me. "I think you do…"

"If you wanna get *hurt*, dumbass, I can make that happen," I snarl at him, and he chuckles.

"There's the Kyran we all know and love." He winks.

Ugh. He's so obnoxious.

I feel like my cheeks are flushing, and I'm not sure why. My eyes dip briefly over the loose tank top he's wearing, which exposes the muscles in his sides… Sprinkled with ink. Glistening with a little sweat. His gray sweats are resting low on his hips, fitted enough that I can make out the slope of his ass…

I remember holding on to it… How round and firm it was in my hands.

My throat is suddenly bone-dry, a nauseated feeling wiggling around inside me.

Spinning away from him quickly, I grunt, “I’m outta here.”

“Wait,” he calls, and I reluctantly pause, peeking at him over my shoulder. He drops the dumbbell and hops over to me. “You wanna spot me?”

“No,” I huff, ignoring the fact that I can smell him; that goddamn familiar scent I can’t identify.

He inches in even closer and whispers, “Don’t be a baby.”

It’s too warm. I gotta get out of here.

“Fuck off…” I mumble again, stomping away and clinging to the hostility as I leave the gym…

With the distinct feeling of his eyes on my ass.

I’m exhausted, but I’m flying high.

We’re in Arizona and we just won another playoff game. Kicked the crap out of the Wildcats, thirty-two to fourteen, then went out to dinner and celebrated as a team, getting rowdy and annoying everyone else in the restaurant.

Not kidding. The people of Tucson weren’t exactly thrilled about us New Englanders showing up and crushing their team.

But we don’t care. We’re killing it this season, and it feels like nothing can stop us. Which is why when Guty and Theo begged me to come party in Theo’s room with the rest of the team and a bunch of girls, I was actually considering it—even though Coach strictly warned us against getting wild tonight.

But then the rational part of me insisted on going back to my room to get some rest. We have a seven a.m. flight back to Boston and I’d really like not to be hungover for it.

I’m sharing a room with Guty, and since he’s up the hall causing mayhem, I have the room to myself, which is perfect. I just want to turn the

TV on at low volume and let it lull me to sleep. I'm sure it won't take long, because my body is aching and my mind is tired as hell.

Stripping down to my boxers, I crawl into the insanely comfy hotel bed, flipping channels until I settled on reruns of *The Office*. I plug my phone in to charge on the nightstand, setting two alarms to make sure I don't oversleep. That's when I spot a new text.

Avi: Congrats, superstar. Awesome game tonight.

Choosing to be polite, I type out a quick reply.

Me: Thanks

He reads it the second I hit send, and I can't help the way my lips curl smugly at the idea that he was waiting for me to respond. His typing bubbles pop up, and I wait patiently for whatever nonsense he's about to say.

Avi: So I guess you can still win games even without your good luck charm around…

Avi: (Me)

My smile grows, and even a little chuckle erupts from my lips before I recognize what I'm doing and crush it to send him a response.

Me: It was definitely easier to concentrate without your annoying ass popping and locking on the sidelines

Avi: I knew you were watching my performance

I scoff out loud.

Me: Performance?? *accusatory eyebrow-lifted emoji*

Avi: Uh yea. Baldwin the Eagle gets funky

Me: You're an idiot

Avi: So what are you doing?

I squint at the screen.

Me: I'm going to bed… Why? What are you doing?

Avi: Also going to bed.

Avi: So it's kinda like we're… going to bed together ;)

Me: No. It's not.

Me: And isn't it like 10pm there?? Why are you going to bed so early…

Avi: Ok you caught me. I'm in bed because I'm playing with my dick…

I swallow, shifting under the covers as a frisson of unwanted excitement tickles my gut.

Avi: You wanna see?

Me: No.

But of course, because he's Avi, that doesn't stop him.

Only a second later, a picture of his dick pops up on my screen. And like a reflex, I slap my phone screen down on my stomach.

Shaking my head, I mutter, "Dumbass," to no one, preparing to put my phone away and go to bed. But then, against my will, my hand slowly flips my phone back up, and I bite my lip. *Just a quick peek…*

The dick on the screen is hard, and long, and the one I've come to know as *Avi's*. His hand is curled around it, thumb teasing the thick exposed crown.

Avi: Now your turn

Me: I'm not doing this with you

Avi: *three pouty face emojis*

Me: Avi…

Avi: Are you alone?

Me: Yes…

Avi: Then be a good boy and take your cock out for me

A chill runs over my flesh, the thump in my nuts reminding me of how many days it's been since I came. And then my mind slithers back to the memory of the last time I came... And what was happening to me when it occurred.

I bite my lip, my dick already stiffening up good from remembering. But I force myself to stand firm and reply.

Me: That doesn't work if we're not filming, dickwad.

Avi: Who says I can't upload this stuff for the fans?

Avi: It'll be even better if you send me a video…

I'm desperate to fight against the urge to obey him when another message pops up.

Avi: Please, baby? I've been thinking about your ass all day… I'm fucking dripping for it

Grumbling to myself, I run my free hand down to my cock, playing with it over my boxers as my eyes fall shut. *Why am I even entertaining this?? Why are my balls all tingly from that one stupid message?*

I can't figure it out, because it doesn't make sense. But even though I know I *shouldn't*, I slip my boxers down and snap a picture of my dick.

Just one. To shut him up.

Avi responds seconds after he gets it.

Avi: God your dick looks good

Chewing on my lower lip some more, I type out…

Me: Really?

Avi: Yea. It's so big…

My breathing is picking up, my body weighted and sinking me deeper into this rabbit hole as I slowly type the words…

Me: Yours is big too

Avi: I know. Wanna rub em together?

I find myself nodding without even realizing it, fisting my cock and stroking in gradual pumps. *I just need to come, that's all. It's just an orgasm, it doesn't matter where it comes from…*

Avi: You want me to play with your pretty cock with my tongue?

Me: Yea… I like when you do that

Avi: You do… I know it cuz you give me little pulses of cum to suck out

"Fuck…" My head tips back and my eyes close, hand kneading up and down while I imagine him doing it… Toying with my cock between those soft, pouty lips.

I can't believe I'm doing this… It's *so* stupid and it's not part of the plan. Plus, Guty could walk in here any minute.

But then that thought swells my cock even thicker in my palm.

Avi: Record yourself

My hands are shaky from the adrenaline and the pent-up secret lust as I heed his command and press record, capturing myself jerking my dick. It's only a few seconds, but when I send it, he goes silent for a full minute.

Avi: That is so goddamn hot

He likes it…

Me: Do you wish I was there?

Avi: Yea… I want you in this bed with me so bad

My inherent need to fight this is fading fast, becoming nothing but background noise to the overwhelming bellows of desire.

Me: What would you do?

Avi: I would tease your cock with my mouth

"Mmmm…" I'm burning up in the bed, my skin hot and flushed. Fist pumping harder on my erection, I graze the head with my fingers, wishing like hell it was his tongue.

Avi: Then I would kneel over your shoulders and feed you mine, one inch at a time

Before I can even think of what to say to that, he sends me a video. When I press play, my wide eyes immediately stick to the screen, marveling at the recording of his dick up close, long fingers playing with it before sliding down to fondle his nuts.

Avi: Open wide for me baby

Avi: I want you sucking on my balls… licking my ass

A shivering groan escapes me while I picture it… *Sitting astride my shoulders, dragging the wet head of his cock all over my lips. Riding my face…*

Avi: I'm FaceTiming you. Right now.

A sudden jolt of fear and humiliation stiffens my muscles.

Me: No. Don't do that.

Avi: Answer the fucking call, Kyran. I need to see you.

Something weird thumps in my chest, and I don't even have time to freak out over it because my phone is now ringing with an incoming video call. Sitting up on my elbows, I frantically brush my hair back, jittering nervously as I swipe to answer.

"Hi." His head slants, and my teeth clench, holding on to my forced scowl for dear life.

"What do you want…?" I grumble, cheeks heating beneath his gaze over the phone screen.

His eyes are sliding down, assessing the fact that I appear naked, though that part should be obvious based on what we were just doing. He looks like he's naked too, and I can't seem to remove my other hand from where it's leisurely running up and down my dick.

“I want to make you come,” he whispers, then bites his lip. “From thousands of miles away.”

I’m really forcing myself to appear annoyed by him, but there’s something about being under his gaze that makes me feel like I’m being seared by a laser beam of forbidden arousal.

“That’s good… Keep giving me that look.” His dark lashes flutter while his other arm moves. I think he’s stroking his cock the same way I am.

“What look?” I growl, tilting my head as the phone angles down a bit and I catch a peek of his abs.

“The Kyran signature scowl mixed with your fuck-me eyes.” He grins lazily. “It’s my favorite look.”

“Stop talking,” I hiss, dropping my head back while I fuck my fist harder, the frustration he brings with our every interaction working me up into a frenzy of confusing need.

“But I need to tell you something…” he whispers, and my eyes creep open, locking on his gray irises, darkened by the lack of light in his bedroom.

“Tell me then,” I mumble.

“I wanna eat your ass, baby,” he hums, and my balls throb, *hard*. Before I can even scold him about the *baby* thing, he goes on. “I’ve been thinking about it since the last time… I wanna lick you until you’re crying for me, and then I wanna stuff my cock deep inside you.”

“*Ffuck*…” I whimper, clamping at his words and the way he’s rumbling them at me through the phone.

“Show me your ass, Ky,” he demands.

“B-but you’re not… recording.” My body is hurdling the hesitations my mind won’t stop tossing up like roadblocks.

It’s supposed to be work… We’re not supposed to…

“Yes, I am.” He interrupts my frantic obsessing, aiming the phone toward his video camera. “I’m recording this special phone sex video for our fans. Now, give us all what we want, superstar.”

Oh… Well, in that case…

Sitting up, I gaze around the room. “I might not have long… What if my roommate comes back?”

Avi shrugs. “Even more *forbidden*, then.” He grins. “Imagine you, bent over in bed in your hotel room, teasing us with your perfect ass when someone could walk in any minute…”

I can’t deny that my dick is leaking at the thought. So I roll over onto all fours, giving up the fight and giving in to my apparent unwavering need to get off in the most illicit ways possible.

Propping my phone up against a pillow, I turn to give him a full view of my ass from behind while my face heats like an oven at how slutty I must look right now.

But then I hear Avi purr; a sexy, growly little groan of appreciation that turns the wanton thrill way up.

“Look at that ass… Fucking *perfection*,” he hums. “Tease your hole for me, gorgeous. Show me what I’m missing.”

Reaching behind myself, I swipe a shaky finger up and down over my rim, my eyes falling shut at the sound of his breathing growing heavier over the phone.

“You wanna fuck me, don’t you?” I whisper, pressing my fingertip into my hole, just a little. It’s not lubed or anything, but the feeling of it, desperate to get inside, has my hips moving, chasing friction on my aching cock.

“If I could fly there right now just to fuck you, I would,” he grumbles, and my chest tightens, stomach clenching.

“H-how would you do it?” I stammer out the words, pulse pinging as my body coils.

“I would come up behind you,” Avi growls. “Stuff your face into the mattress, and slide every inch of my rock-hard dick into you. In one… *long*… thrust.”

Moans are fleeing my lips faster than I can attempt to control them. “Fast or slow?”

“Slow… at first,” he whispers. “But just being inside that warm, tight spot would have me riding you, rough and *deep*.”

My face drops down into the comforter, ass up while I plunge my finger in, ignoring the burn of penetration with no lube. I’m just… *needing* it. I don’t understand it at all, but I need to be filled, the desire so strong it’s almost primal.

“Give me your cock…” I gasp and pant. “God, I fucking want it so bad.”

“Baby, turn around,” Avi pleads in a hoarse tone. “Show me your body. I want to look at how beautiful you are.”

I don’t even remember where I am. I’m buzzing so fiercely on this craving, it’s like I’m acting on total impulse. Flipping around, I grab the phone, lying down on my back while I angle the camera down over my body.

“Spread your legs,” he commands. And I do, parting them wide and lifting my hips a bit to give him a view of my balls and my ass. “So, *so* good… All those places for my tongue to explore.”

Grasping onto my cock, I work up to stroking again, writhing up to my hand while he breathes and growls and fucks his fist.

“Wet your finger this time.”

Slipping my index and middle fingers into my mouth, I suck them sloppily, pulling them out and dragging them down my chest. I flick over my nipples, the sensation zapping me in the groin as my fingers trail lower, between my legs.

“I know you’re missing my cock right now…” he hums. “Wishing I was there to fuck you full. But you’ll have to make due with your fingers, okay?”

Chomping down on my lip, I nod fast, stuffing both fingers between my cheeks. I don’t even care about pain or discomfort at this point… I’m fucking *throbbing* deep in my core and I need relief. So I push my fingers inside myself, forcing my ass to relax enough to take them at once.

Angling the camera, I let Avi watch as they stretch me, sliding in as deep as I can get them. It’s so frustratingly good, the sensation of being entered while also knowing it’s nowhere near as deep, or wide, as it was last time. When it was his dick.

“Pump them for me, baby.” His voice is uneven, raspy and hushed. I love the sound of it… It means he’s turned on as fuck and about to come. *Just from watching me… This must be the way the fans feel.* “Fuck that tiny hole with your fingers the way I’d do it with my big dick…”

“Uhhhfuck… Fuck me. I want you to *fuck me*… harder.” I’m not even aware of what I’m saying, I’m just rutting my hips against my hand while my cock flinches and swells on my abs.

Lifting the phone and prying my eyes open enough to take a peek at Avi, I find him chewing on his bottom lip, eyes glued to what I’m doing while his hand works furiously on his dick.

“I’m fucking you harder, baby,” he gasps, and I groan, slamming my fingers into my ass over and over. “Fuck yea… Feel this dick.”

“Come for me,” I whisper, lighting up when my fingers brush my prostate. “I wanna w-watch you… come.”

“I’m right there,” he grunts. “I’m so close…”

“Me, too.”

I’m focused on is his face. The way he’s struggling to keep his eyes open, to watch what I’m doing…

Legs wide open, hand punishing my ass… Dick leaking all over my abs without a single touch. He looks drunk on it, and so am I. All I want in the *world* is to come right now…

To come with him. For the fans… and for *him*.

Avi lets out a choked gasp. “Baby, I’m coming…”

“Come inside me,” I sob, as quietly as I can while my climax rushes to the surface.

“*Ohhfuck*, I’m coming in you.” He angles the camera at his dick, his hand milking out stream after stream of cum all over his abs. “You feel me pulsing in you, baby?”

“Yea, *yes*,” I groan as my dick shoots off, ass clenching so tight on my fingers, I can barely move them. “Fuck yea, oh my *God*…”

Cum sprays from my cock, all the way up to my chest, decorating me while I flutter and fight for breath. Another hands-free orgasm… *What. The. Fuck.*

I’m buzzing for far too long, just lying here drenched in cum with my fingers in my ass. Until a noise out in the hall flings my eyes open, and my body upright.

“Oh fuck, oh Jesus…” Leaping out of bed with my boxers in hand, I scamper naked into the bathroom and close the door, my heart flying against my ribcage.

Avi is laughing, and I aim the screen at my face. “It’s not funny. I think someone’s coming in…”

“You’re so cute,” he yawns, and I scowl, resting my phone against the sink mirror while I clean myself up.

“Shut up, asshole.”

I don’t hear any more sounds, so I’m guessing I just freaked out over nothing. But still… I couldn’t risk it. The last thing I need is for Guty to walk in while I’m covered in my own cum, fingers stuffed in my ass and my stepbrother on FaceTime.

“I can’t wait for you to get back here…” Avi mumbles, and I peer at the screen to find him basically asleep, curled up naked in his bed.

Something strange sets between my ribs, something tight and bothersome, like… homesickness. But I push it away and finish getting myself cleaned up, ignoring the soreness in my ass, and my chest.

“I gotta go,” I huff to him.

“Don’t leave me, baby…” he whispers sleepily. “Just keep me…”

I’m not sure if he was trying to say *keep me on*, as in on the phone. But I dispel it either way, because I obviously can’t do that.

“I’m hanging up now, Avi,” I speak softly, blinking at him while he sleeps. “I’ll… I’ll see you soon.”

Ending the call, I wander out of the bathroom, plugging my phone back in on the nightstand and curling up in bed. And because I’m exhausted and sated, I fall fast into a calming slumber…

With a smile I can no longer fight resting comfortably on my lips.

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

sluttypeach91: @Backwardz_Cap & @Not_Your_Baby I'd let you both pound me into next Sunday with only some crisco and a prayer.
Olivia_Oil: Not_Your_Baby Ok but could you be my Daddy instead? Asking for a friend. (It's me. I'm the friend.)

The music blares melodies into my ears as my fingers work.

Gripping the charcoal pencil, I drag it along the paper, sketching lines, curves, and slopes. I use my thumb to blur some shadow while song lyrics resonate in my thoughts.

But I have to stop, and take a breath. *It's getting too real…*

Rolling up a joint, I keep my headphones on while I smoke, leaned back in my chair and staring at a blank space on my white bedroom wall.

Art has been my one and only passion since I was old enough to hold a crayon. Even when I was little, my drawings were leaps and bounds more advanced than anyone else's in school.

But that was about it. My talents begin and end with art, and to a lot of people, that's not exactly the gift you'd think it is. I've heard it my whole life, from pretty much everyone other than my mom…

You can't make a career out of that.

Art will never pay the bills.

These are great doodles, but what do you plan to do with your life??

Even here in school, it's all about graphic design, because that's something you can actually make money doing. And graphic design is all well and good… I mean, I'm decent at it.

But I don't *care* about it. It doesn't make me feel anything… And it definitely doesn't bring me joy.

The anxiety I feel at constantly being told I won't be able to support myself with my art is almost crippling, sucking the satisfaction out of the thing I love. Hence the nonstop weed smoking. At this point, I can't tell if I'm leaning on the weed for support, as a medication… Or if I'm using it as a crutch, to kill any and all feelings rather than dealing with the harsh reality that maybe I'll never amount to *anything*.

I thought coming here to BC would ground me, and help me be more responsible. Help me to finally stop drifting and figure out who the fuck I am; who I *want* to be. But so far, all it's done is magnify my insecurities.

Yes, college is where I uncovered my bisexuality. But I don't think college was *responsible* for that revelation. It just so happens to be the place where I figured it out.

The only thing attending BC has actually given me is a reason to become a pornstar.

Yea, I know… Pornstar is sort of glorying it. The realistic term, I suppose, would be *sex worker*… In that people pay me in exchange for performing sex acts. Sex *is* my work. And despite how it started, I really enjoy doing it.

I like being on OnlyFans. I like the attention, I sure as shit like the money… And I like how it's broken down some of the sky-high wall between me and Kyran.

That part is still very messy, though. Because while I'm enjoying our time together for more than just the orgasms, I can tell that we're not exactly on the same page. Kyran is the epitome of hot and cold. One second, we're melting together, so close it's like we're one goddamn person, and the next, he's the same elusive and detached grump he's been since the moment I met him.

And that's the most complicated part of all this… I can't tell where my stepbrother who thoroughly dislikes me ends, and my business partner who kisses me like my lips are holding him to the earth begins.

It's all become so convoluted. I know Kyran's body enjoys what we do together… But his mind is still stuck on seeing this as a means to make money. Which makes the confusing attachment I've been forming to him incredibly worrying.

So I suppose I am able to care about things… They're just not things that will help me in any real way. In fact, it seems like the things I care about are things that will ultimately fuck me over.

It's a great spot to be in.

Glancing at the picture I've been working on, I trace the body on the page with my fingertip, wishing it was real. And no matter how loudly I play the music in my ears, I can't seem to drown out the sounds of his voice, rasped and panting how badly he wants me.

It's just physical, I keep reminding myself over and over while I smoke the joint down to my fingertips. *You just like how it feels to touch him and kiss him and fuck him, that's all.*

It can't be more than that, and it won't be. Because he's your stepbrother, and he's doing this for the money.

You both are.

It's all just an act… for the fans.

An alarm starts pinging in my ear, cutting off the quixotic sounds of lyrics that all seem to remind me of him. Lifting up my phone, I swipe away the alert for the team dinner happening at the stadium in a half-hour.

Two days ago, Coach Matthews sent an email to every member of the Eagles team, which apparently includes *all* of us—the players, the coaches, cheerleaders, and even the mascot—asking us to show up for a catered buffet dinner in the stadium conference room. I'm not sure exactly what this meeting is about, or why my presence in required, but I'm guessing it probably has something to do with the remaining playoff games and preparing for the Rose Bowl.

I don't really want to go to this thing, knowing Kyran will be there, and I haven't spoken to him since our night of hot video phone sex while he was in Arizona. Being the naïve moron I am, I kind of expected him to show up right when he got home. But that was stupid, because he didn't. I haven't gotten so much as a text message in the two days since he's been back, and I *refuse* to be the one to text him first.

I just don't want it to feel like I'm chasing after him, because I'm not. I can't do this to myself… thinking things are happening when they really aren't. Concocting feelings in my head… it will only lead to more confusion for me, and I have enough of that as it is.

I'm supposed to be figuring myself out, not drumming up more questions.

Slipping into some fresh black jeans and a flannel, I lace up my boots, shrug into my coat, and head out into the nip of December. It hasn't snowed yet, but they're predicting it for the holidays next week. We're supposed to be going home for the break, and to say I'm anxious about it would be putting it mildly.

Attempting to be festive with my mother, Tom, *and* Kyran just sounds like something that will make me want to fa-la-la-la-light myself on fire.

The walk to the stadium is short, but still my hands are ice cold by the time I get inside. There are people everywhere, varying members of the team meandering the halls toward the conference room, following the smell of food.

As soon as I'm inside, I immediately regret the decision to come here. The room is filled with football players, the coaching staff, and cheerleaders… None of whom even notice me as I slink inside, past the buffet tables lined with warming trays of food.

I'm not trying to actively seek out Kyran, but of course my eyes find him right away. He's standing in a group of his teammates, chatting and laughing. And he must feel me staring at him, because he looks up, our eyes meeting for a split second that tightens my chest until his break away and return to his friends.

Shaking my head to myself, I find a seat and plop down into it. This is going to suck major ass. *And not in the good way.*

The chatter amongst the groups of people goes on for minutes, during which I just fidget in my seat, peering around the room in search of booze. Of course there isn't any… Because more than half the people in here aren't twenty-one. Not that I'm a huge drinker. I mean, I like to get lit at parties, mainly to help me loosen up and fight that never-ending feeling that I don't belong anywhere. But now, more than ever, I wish I'd snuck a water bottle filled with Schnapps into my coat pocket.

"Thank you all for coming," Coach Matthews finally says. *Let's get this show on the road so I can get out of here…* "If you would all take a seat, I'll make this quick. We're just here to talk about the Rose Bowl, and then you can enjoy some dinner."

Sighing, I watch Kyran out of the corner of my eye as he walks closer to where I'm seated. There's an empty chair right next to me, and I see him glance at it. My face tilts in his direction, and he swallows before turning

and pulling out a chair at the next table over, sitting down next to Guty and Theo.

Figures. Did you really expect him to sit with you??

"The Eagles have been playing an immaculate season," Coach starts, his voice booming. "And every person in this room is partly responsible. As a unit, we've managed one of the best records this team has ever had, and the best record in the NCAA this season." He claps. "Give yourselves a round of applause. You deserve it."

Everyone cheers and hoots, the players bellowing out their enthusiasm louder than everyone else, while I just clap unenthusiastically, feeling beyond awkward even being here.

I'm not a part of this… The stoner art nerd, stranded in a sea of jocks.

"We have two more games to win before we make it to the Rose Bowl," Coach says as the noise fades. "And I'm fully confident that we'll be playing in California. So I want to take a moment to single out our captain…" He gestures to Kyran. "Number Nine, Kyran Harbor. Let's hear it for our quarterback, with the most passing yards in the division!"

The room erupts in cheers, whistles, and applause for Kyran, who's sitting there, smiling politely. His cheeks are flushed, and I hate the way it flutters my stomach. It's just so *obnoxious* how good he looks… Sandy hair always perfectly brushed back by his fingers… Hazel eyes glittering. His sharp jaw and full lips. That body…

I mean, come on. Can he not be hot as fuck for two seconds??

"Kyran, we're all beyond proud of where you've taken our team this season." Coach grins.

"It's a group effort," Kyran murmurs, almost politically. *He sounds like he's running for office.* "We got here, together."

His gaze slides around the room, landing on me for a second, smile wavering just a bit as he looks away. I have to fight not to roll my eyes.

"But I have to give a shout-out to one person… who's been there for me time and time again," Kyran says. And for some idiotic reason, my gut starts crawling up my esophagus. He shifts and smiles. "My main man, Samson Gutierrez."

Everyone whoops as Guty smirks at Kyran, slapping him on the shoulder. My stomach retreats, twisting and turning in this yucky sensation, like I've eaten something bad. There's no plausible reason for me to be

jealous right now… It's not like Kyran and Guty are hooking up. They're just teammates and best friends.

Right??

I blink hard. *No, they're not hooking up. That's ridiculous.*

And why do you care??

"The two of you, along with the rest of our incredible players, will get us to the Rose Bowl," Coach says with confidence. "Who's ready to bring that trophy home to Boston?!"

Everyone jumps up, shouting their excitement. Everyone but me. I may as well be the chair I'm sitting in, I'm so invisible here.

"Alright!" Coach smacks his hands together. "Let's get ready to kick some Spartan ass! And don't forget about the team banquet next month. If all goes accordingly, the next time we sit down to dinner together will be the night before the championship game!"

Some more claps and cheers ring out as the assistant coach tells us all to help ourselves to food. People get up and mull around the buffet tables while I wonder how many more minutes I need to sit here before I can casually slip away.

Fuck it. No one would notice if I left.

I'm about to stand up and bolt when a different annoying blonde plops down in the seat next to me.

"Hi, Baldwin!" Lexi Erikson chirps, giggling and flipping her hair over her shoulder. "Are you excited?"

My face should answer that question for her, but I mumble, "Oh yea… I'm so giddy, I might pee myself."

She shoots me a look, though still beaming with a sparkly white smile. I guess she's pretty… In your standard, bleach-blonde size-two kind of way. *Not my type, but whatever.*

I guess I like my blondes taller… with broader shoulders and a permanent scowl.

"Your stepbrother is pretty amazing, huh?" she says on a swoony breath, eyes following Kyran as he scoops lasagna onto a plate, smiling and joking around with Guty and Theo. "If we win this year, he could be looking at a draft to the NFL."

My forehead lines at her before my gaze slinks to Kyran. I don't know why this thought never occurred to me… But she's totally right. Kyran is

that good. When the scouts come around next year, I'm sure they'll have their eyes on him.

Discomfort jabs at my chest from the inside, like a hand poking fingers between my ribs. *What if Kyran got drafted? He could end up anywhere in the country… Somewhere far away from here.*

I've always known the OnlyFans was temporary, but for some reason, this fact just smacked me in the face. *He might not even need money for two more years of school…*

And then this whole thing would be nothing but a secret memory.

I'm sure it's Kyran's dream to go to the NFL. That's what all football players strive for, isn't it? Getting to the top? Signing to a national team… Going to the Super Bowl.

They're achievable goals for superstar Kyran Harbor. He's already a success, and it won't be long before he leaves all of this, and his worthless stoner stepbrother behind.

"Yea, look… this has been fun, but I think I'm gonna—"

My words are cut off when Lexi starts waving and squealing, "Guys, over here!"

Guty and Theo stalk over to our table with their plates, while Kyran lingers behind them, glaring like he doesn't want to sit anywhere near me. But it's too late. His friends are already taking their seats.

"I was just catching up with *Baldwin*," Lexi sneers at me, then shoots a flirtatious smirk at Kyran as he hesitantly wanders over. There's a seat next to me, and one next to her, and I can see him weighing his options before he sinks down beside Lexi.

Rolling my eyes, I sigh, "You know that's not my actual name, right?"

"I do." Her chin lifts in my direction. "But I don't remember what your actual name is."

My fingers dig aggressively into my thighs as my jaw tightens. "It's—"

"I was just talking to your stepbrother about your NFL prospects," Lexi interrupts me again, turning to flutter her fake lashes at Kyran.

Kyran's eyes flit nervously to mine before dropping to his plate, where he's poking at food with his fork. "Even if that did come up, it wouldn't be until next season…"

"What are you talking about, bro?!" Theo gasps excitedly. "There's no way the scouts won't be looking at you!"

“Yea, Nueve,” Guty agrees in between shoveling food into his mouth. “They’ll probably be at the Rose Bowl too. Watching your sexy ass.”

Guty grins teasingly at Kyran, then winks. And now I can’t stop imagining the two of them together… hooking up in secret in their shared dorm room, the way Kyran and I do in mine.

He’s just joking around, idiot. Guty is straight…

And I guess so is Kyran…?

Ugh. This is annoying.

Kyran chuckles, but his amusement falls off his face when our eyes meet. As if my presence physically repels his happiness.

Fuck this shit. I need to leave. I hate it here.

“Hey, Avi…” Guty says my name, distracting me from my exit strategy. “Why don’t you come to the away games?” He glances up from his plate and smirks. “We could use some of your hype during the rest of the playoffs.”

I can’t tell if he’s fucking with me or not, which seems to be a signature for him. He’s loud and jokes around a lot, so it’s hard to tell when he’s being serious.

“Yea, man! I love when you do the robot,” Theo cackles, and Guty nods in agreement, both of them launching into robot moves while seated.

Normally, I would be laughing it off with them, but I’m really not feeling it right now. I’m finding it difficult to even force one of my usual carefree grins, and I think it’s because Kyran’s look of suffocated chagrin is making me twitchy.

“We don’t need him at the away games,” Kyran mumbles, still playing with his food. “He’s too distracting, anyway.”

Uh… Excuse me??

My face contorts in puzzled outraged as I lean in, folding my hands on the table. “Maybe I’m only distracting to *you*, superstar.”

His eyes lift to mine, shooting rage at me through the swirls of bronze and green. “Whatever, stalker. Don’t act like you signed up to be the mascot for any other reason than to follow me around some more.”

Anger sizzles in my veins like acid as my jaw ticks. “*Follow* you?? Check your ego, golden boy. I don’t care enough about you to follow you anywhere.”

He drops his fork on his plate with a loud clink, straightening in his seat. “Oh, you mean like you *didn’t* follow me to BC??”

My mouth falls open in a silent gasp as I look around the table. Guty and Theo are gawking at us both uneasily, as if they're preparing to break us up. And Lexi has a wicked grin resting on her lips, arms folded over her chest like she's enjoying the drama.

"What the fuck is your problem?" I hiss at Kyran through gritted teeth.

"As always, *you* are my fucking problem." He stands his ground like the goddamn stubborn asshole he is. "You *being here* is my problem."

"You're such an uptight prick," I scoff.

"Yea, and you're clearly obsessed with me," he rumbles smugly, though there's no amusement on his face or in his tone. He's straight up being a massive fucking prick to me for no reason, just like he's been doing since the moment we met.

"I don't think you wanna pull that thread…" I mutter quietly, then mouth the word *baby*, cocking my head to the side.

His eyes harden as he grips the edge of the table, maybe to hold himself back. "Just leave, loser. No one wants you here."

My body is keyed up with adrenaline-fueled fury as I scoot my chair out behind me with a loud scrape, standing fast. "*Perfect*. Because I'd rather choke to death on this shitty food than spend one more second looking at you."

Kicking the chair away, I storm out of the room, getting myself the fuck out of there before I explode. I can feel all the eyes in the room on me as I go, but I don't even fucking care. I just need to leave. *Get as far away from him as possible…*

I'm *fuming* the entire walk back to my dorm.

Who the fuck does he think he is?? What gives him the right to talk to me like that?

I haven't done shit to him but breathe in his fucking presence, and for years he's been treating me like that's the worst thing I could ever do. Like my existence is some great tragedy and I just don't fucking get it.

Just because my mom married his dad?

Just because we're different…?

Why does that make him hate me so much??

Whipping open the door to my dorm, I stomp inside and slam it shut with a roar. I'm immediately pacing around the room, yanking my hair in my fists. Just when I thought we were finally getting somewhere… Like *maybe* he'd stopped hating me so much for no reason, he turns around and

goes right back to his default bitch ass ways, privileged, stuck-up dickhead that he is.

"Fuck you," I growl under my breath, storming into the kitchen to grab something that will calm me down.

Opening a bottle of Jack Daniels, I take a large swig, wincing as I do. Then I reach into my pocket for my vape pen, sucking a long, hard drag, holding it in my lungs while I squeeze my eyes shut tight. Letting out the pungent smoke, I try my hardest to calm down, but I'm still fucking pissed. I end up ripping a few more shots from the bottle before I can even unclench my muscles enough to move again.

Robin comes padding over to me with one of her little catnip toys in her mouth that she always carries around, rubbing her body on my legs. I think she can sense that I'm upset, and aiming my hazy gaze down at her, I can't help but relax just a little.

Scooping her up into my arms, I nuzzle my face on her fuzzy head. "He's just such a prick sometimes, ya know?"

Her purring is definitely calming down. Shuffling over to the couch, I plop onto it, petting her while she nestles up on my lap. *Thank the gods for this little puffball to cheer me up.*

"If he thinks he can just show up here after *that*, he's got another thing coming," I grumble to her while my brain sifts through memories of him showing up in the middle of the night.

It's what he does, after all. Because no matter how much he *hates* me, he still likes what we do in secret. I know he does.

And even though I wish I didn't, I like it too.

If those friends of his only knew… And Lexi, what a dumbass. He can't even get hard when he tries to hook up with her, yet she's still just gaga over him. It's pathetic.

Kyran Harbor has a secret that only *I* know, and that gives me some comfort while I putter around for the rest of the night. I change into my comfy clothes, eat a bowl of Lucky Charms, then put some music on in my bedroom while I draw.

Without even realizing it, I've sketched a picture of Kyran, and unfortunately, it's not the first. So in order to make myself feel better, I turn this one into a comic of him in his uniform on the football field, bent over on all fours. Face down, ass up. *That's how you like it, right, superstar?*

I’m grinning and chuckling to myself, drawing people cheering in the stands, when there’s a knock at my door. And my head falls forward, a helpless growl fleeing my lips.

You’ve gotta be fucking kidding me…

Blatantly ignoring the satisfaction with a dash of excitement fluttering inside me, I stand up and waltz slowly out of the bedroom. But I don’t go to the door right away. I stand there, arms folded over my chest, glaring at it.

More knocking. And I can *tell* it’s him. He has this way of knocking that’s timidly eager, just like everything else he does with me when no one is around.

“Who is it…?” I call out, smirking.

“Avi… Please let me in,” Kyran calls softly through the door. “We need to talk.”

“I think you said enough,” I grunt. But I can’t help stepping over quietly, peering through the peephole.

I watch him shifting on his feet, fingers sifting into his golden hair. “I just… I need to talk to you. Please?”

His gaze lifts to the peephole, and I shiver when our eyes meet through it. I know he can’t see me, but we’re looking right at each other, and it’s gnawing at my gut like a zombie is eating me alive.

I fucking *hate* that I want to let him in so badly. I wish I could just tell him to fuck off… But my body doesn’t seem to share my mind’s desire to shut him down.

My hand reaches for the lock as his eyes are flinging up and down the hallway.

“Avi… *Please* let me in.” He’s practically pouting, and I roll my eyes. At *myself*, because I’m an idiot.

Turning the lock slowly, I flip it, then open the door. Just a crack.

Our eyes meet and we stare at each other for a second, both of our chests moving through visible breaths of anticipation. It’s futile… The attempts we’re both making.

No matter how hard he tries to push me away, he can’t stop showing up like this. And no matter how hard I fight it, I can’t escape the truth…

I don’t want him to.

Opening the door wider, I watch him as he slinks by me, closing the door and locking it once he’s inside. I press my back to it, chewing on my bottom lip while he ripples in place, wringing his hands and staring at his

shoes. His eyes travel up me slowly, landing on mine. His lips part, but nothing comes out.

I'm feeling all hot and itchy under my skin, my fingers twitching with the need to touch him, then smack myself for being so dumb.

I should be yelling at him… calling him an asshole. Maybe even punching him in the face. But I don't want to do any of that. All I want to do is…

Shoving myself off the door, I push into his space, and he backs up against the wall. His lips are trembling, cheeks blushed pink, eyes wide. I can't even help myself… I love the way he looks way too much to think rationally.

Acting purely on impulse, I grasp his chiseled jaw in my hands, sealing our bodies together. When our dicks touch, his lashes flutter.

"I… Avi, I'm…" he stammers, but I don't let him finish.

I don't want to hear his mouth anymore. *I just want to taste it…*

Dropping my lips to his, I cut off his words and swallow his sweet, startled gasp, kissing him fast and sucking him rough. There's very little fight in him right now, none of his usual hesitation. He gives in to me right away, opening up wide for me, petting my tongue with his while we breathe and grunt through the vicious suction.

His hands are shaky as he slides them onto my lower back, fingers creeping inside the waist of my pants. And I'm just holding his face still, keeping him right where I want him, sucking and biting those plush lips until my dick is engorged between us.

Kyran pulls me closer, tugging my hips to his. Grinding my length on him, I can feel how hard he is already, his dick stiff and aching to be freed. Which gives me an idea.

Kissing him a few more times, I pry my lips off and quickly spin him around so that his front is plastered to the wall. I drop a few tender kisses on the nape of his neck, and he arches up to me while I reach around to his front to undo his pants.

Our panting rings through the room as I drop to my knees, bringing his pants and boxers down with me. Cupping his ass, I'm admiring how firm yet perfectly round it is, practically drooling like I'm awaiting a forbidden feast of peachy goodness.

Reaching through his legs, I grab his cock and he groans. I aim it downward, stroking him in my fist, kissing and nipping his cheeks.

“You’re dripping for me, baby,” I hum, trailing my tongue along the crack of his ass until he shudders. There are beads of precum *spilling* from the head of his cock, and it’s just too mouthwatering to ignore.

Stuffing my face between his legs, I suck on his dick from behind, lapping at his arousal and pushing my tongue into the skin covering his crown. Kyran’s entire body quakes as he grips the wall, pushing his ass back and parting his legs farther.

“Fuck, *Avi*…” he whimpers while I lose myself in sucking him, moving my mouth up and down on his dick where it’s aimed between my lips like he’s feeding it to me. “You suck me so good…”

Head thickly fogged with lust, I squeeze his ass, swirling my tongue around and around on his velvety head, sucking the skin with my lips and chasing the salty flavor that’s leaking into my mouth. Using my other hand, I tease his nuts with my fingers, caressing and pulling them, maybe a little hard.

I might want to punish him, just a tad.

Kyran gasps, and I peek up to find him gazing down at me. “Avi… I’m sorry.”

Releasing his cock from my lips, I mumble, “I know. It’s okay,” then slide him back into my mouth.

“No. It’s *not*,” he insists, groaning at the sensation. But I hear emotion racking his voice. My eyes stay locked on his while he bites his lip, resting his forehead on the wall. “I’m just… I’m so fucking confused…”

The quiver in his words tears into my chest. I slurp off of his dick and stand, my chest bumping his back. Taking his chin between my fingers, I tug his face to kiss his lips, soft but urgent. I don’t really know what to say, but I’m also not sure if words will even help this situation.

I just want to show him how good it is when we do this.

“You’re here,” I whisper on his pouty mouth, “Because you want to be…”

He nods, reaching out for my hand. I give it to him, and he laces our fingers, bringing them up to his chest.

“Then get naked for me, baby,” I command in a hushed tone. “Like you *want* to.”

I drag him into the bedroom, and he comes willingly. Holding his pants up, he stops in front of my bed, eyes flicking to the tripod. Then he looks to me, blinking like he doesn’t know what to do with himself, because I think

it’s *clear* he doesn’t care if we film this or not. But then *not* filming would mean something else… Something I don’t think either of us is prepared to deal with right now.

Quickly, I turn on the camera, then take a seat on my bed, gazing up at him. I don’t even need to tell him what to do. He lifts his shirt over his head, then shoves his pants down, kicking off his shoes and removing everything to make him fully naked—except for his socks again—and *stunningly* fucking gorgeous.

Maybe it’s weird, but I like the socks. It’s a look that works for him.

I can’t take my eyes off of his body; the creamy complexion, slopes of muscle definition everywhere. Unmarked. He’s a blank canvas, and I’m overflowing with the desire to use my body to bring his to life.

“Come here.” I recline, and he drops onto his knees on the mattress, crawling over me without hesitation. “Take my pants off.”

Kyran’s fingers slip into the waistband of my sweats, tugging them down my legs slowly. He inches back up, but pauses with his face over my hips. His eyes are dark and glistening in his clear state of curious arousal as I bite my lip, taunting him with a look that he has no trouble reading.

Flattening his tongue, he drapes it over my balls, licking a warm, wet line all the way up my dick, like it’s a big, tasty flesh popsicle. It feels *so* fucking good, my cock lurches forward at the sensation, and Kyran’s eyes light up. He does it again, slower, and *wetter*, licking me up and down until my head drops back on the pillow.

“Goddamn, that’s good…” I shudder while he paints me with his tongue, dropping a soft kiss on my glistening tip. “That’s it, baby… Just like that.”

“Like this?” His eyes stay with mine as he kisses again, slow, seductively kissing the head of my cock over and over, his tongue peeking out to tease me until my dick is so hard, it’s stretched up to my navel, shiny with veins popping out everywhere.

He traces them with his tongue and I’m falling apart.

Reaching for his head, I thread my fingers through his hair, easing his mouth over my cock. I’ve never felt anything like the way he’s sucking me right now… Gulping me into the back of his throat, gradually pumping me between his soft lips while his hips grind into the bed. It’s the best head I’ve ever gotten in my life, and if I don’t stop him soon, I’ll be shooting a surprise all over his warm tongue.

“Want a drink?” I mumble, with my toes curling at the fantastic oral performance he’s giving me.

He nods, gliding his mouth up and down every inch of my cock. Then he pops off and breathes, “That’s what I’m driving toward…”

I chuckle. “No, I mean an actual drink.” My thumb swipes his wet bottom lip as he gazes up at me. “There’s a bottle of Jack in the kitchen. Go grab it.”

He gives me a puzzled look for a moment, but doesn’t question me. Sliding off the bed, he staggers out of the room, giving me the opportunity to ogle his ass and all those sexy muscles in his back while he walks away. He returns a moment later with the bottle, crawling back into bed and handing it to me.

Tugging him by the arm, I push him down onto his back and straddle his hips, quickly enough that his eyes widen in surprise. “Open your mouth.”

His chest is jumping while his lips part. I open the bottle and take a sip, leaving it in my mouth as I lean over him. Our dicks are resting together, and I have to take a second to caress mine along his length, loving the sounds he makes when he’s crazy turned on and nervous.

Taking his jaw in my hand, I hover over his mouth like I’m about to kiss him. But instead, I spit the booze in between his ready and waiting lips. He actually hums from within his chest as the liquor dribbles into his mouth. And I watch on eagerly at the delicious sight of his throat adjusting to swallow, some of the liquid spilling over from the corner of his mouth. Using my tongue, I lap it up, then capture his lips, and he kisses me back, feeding me his tongue to taste the fiery bourbon from within his mouth.

“So fucking hot.” I rock my dick into his while his eyes droop shut. “Want more?”

He nods fast. “Yes, please.”

“Mmm… So you *can* be nice to me,” I murmur, sloshing around the bottle of booze. My hand runs up the hard lines of his abs, then onto his chest, cupping his pectoral. “You’re a good boy when we’re all alone…”

“Avi, I said I’m *sorry*,” he whispers, but I shake my head.

“Not right now.”

I take another sip of liquor, spitting it into his mouth. He arches up to me to get it, swallowing and breathing out a ragged groan.

Closing the bottle, I drop it onto the floor, grabbing his hand and using two of his fingers to swipe his wet lips. Then I bring them to my mouth,

stuffing them inside and sucking them hard.

He's squirming beneath me, his cock trapped on his abs by mine, both of them thick and throbbing while my hips move to rub them together. I'm high on the feeling, all electric warm sensation as I suck on his fingers, dragging them out of my mouth and down my chest to tease my nipple.

"Avi…" he whines, hoarse and shivering.

"Mhm?"

God, the feeling of his wet fingers on my nipple has my balls thumping.

"Tell me…" His voice trails off, and he gulps.

I peer down at him, and his cheeks are all manners of flushed. "Tell you what?"

He swallows visibly again, whispering, "Tell me you think I'm beautiful."

He bites his lip, and my head is swimming. I don't know why he's asking me for this… There's no possible way he doesn't know how purely gorgeous he is. People have been telling him he's beautiful the whole time I've known him… Myself included in the recent weeks.

But there's something about the way his eyes are gleaming up at me. The way he's touching me, his fingers slowly brushing up and down my thighs. I think he might be… coming to terms with something. And apparently, I'm a part of that, which makes me feel so damn special, I think my heart is actively trying to spring out of my chest like a cuckoo clock.

I don't want to put too much stock in this, because he's always a little affectionate when we're together in private. And come tomorrow, he'll be back to acting like we're nothing. But for right now, I can see the Kyran who comes back to me; the one who knocks on my door in the middle of the night and crawls into bed with me, awaiting something that only I can give him.

I really, *really* like that Kyran. Even if he's not real.

Letting go of his hand, I melt over him, brushing his lips with mine. "Baby… You are *so* goddamn beautiful. I don't think, I *know*."

Kyran trembles beneath me, fingertips grazing my lower back. Then he mumbles, barely audibly, "You're beautiful too, Avi. I think you're… so fucking sexy."

I freeze for a moment, stunned by what I'm hearing. I don't want to freak him out by gawking at him, but I really can't help it.

He just called me… Sexy?

I mean, beautiful is one thing. *Flowers* are beautiful.

But *sexy??* You only call things sexy when you're physically attracted to them. And sure, maybe it just means that he wants to have sex with me, but even that is sort of amazing.

This isn't just for the camera… I can tell. He's actually feeling this.

Kyran blinks at me, because I'm just staring at him like an idiot. "I mean, I *know* you are. You're hot as fuck… and your body is… perfect."

He's suddenly much squirmier, gnawing on his lower lip while he breaks our eye contact. I'm trying so hard to fight the psychotic grin on my lips, so I lower my face into the crook of his neck to hide it.

"Is it…?" I rumble, kissing his warm skin.

"Yea," he croaks, as my tongue circles his pulse.

"Does my body turn you on, Ky?"

He nods. "Yea…" I peek up at him and he forces a little scowl that no one's buying. "But don't tell anyone I said that."

I chuckle and he grins, playing with my hair beneath my backwards cap.

"Okay, fine," I breathe teasingly. "Your secret's safe with me."

He hums, settling into the bed. "Call me gorgeous again…"

"Anything you want, *gorgeous*." I kiss the words down his throat and onto his chest. "You're so fucking pretty, baby." I trace the curves of his pectoral muscle with my tongue. "*Delicious*… I could sink my teeth into you."

He purrs as my lips cover his nipple, sucking it rough and wet until his back arches. "Your mouth feels… amazing."

"You like it when I kiss you everywhere, beautiful thing?" I flick his nipple with my tongue, then tug it between my teeth.

"*Ah*… yes."

His dick is leaving a sticky mess all over the place, and it's turning me into a wild animal. Moving over to his other nipple, I suck on it for minutes, grinding our hips together until we're both panting and groaning. Then I bite the curve of his pec, sucking and sucking, harder and *harder*. Kyran is whining and whimpering like he loves the feeling, and when I finally let go of his flesh, there's a purple mark where my lips were.

Oh crap… I gave him a hickey on his chest.

Staring at it, my thoughts blur, and I move my lips down to his abs, kissing and sucking and biting there too… Leaving three more dark purple marks down the stones of muscle.

I peer up at him, and he's totally out of it. Head tipped back, eyes closed, lips shivering. He doesn't even notice what I'm doing. Grinning to myself, I continue my descent down his body, making more hickeys on his pelvis. Naturally, I have to stop to suck on his cock for a few minutes, because I just can't not. It's so big and thick and tasty… But then I force myself off of it, kissing his inner thighs.

"Flip over for me, gorgeous," I breathe, sitting back and spinning him onto his stomach.

He goes gladly, and I return to kissing and nipping his sweet, warm, blushed flesh, making a few more hickeys on the taut cheeks of his ass.

"You're biting me an awful lot…" he rumbles, pushing his butt up to my mouth like he likes it.

I chuckle, cupping him in my hands and spreading him open while he gasps. "Oh, how foolish of me. I came back here to *lick*."

Wasting no time, because seriously, I've been wanting to do this for a while now, I lower my lips between his ass and feather my tongue over his hole.

"Uhhfuck… Avi, wait…" He wriggles, fingers digging into the comforter. "Wait… No one's ever—*oh*. Ohhyess that feels *good*…"

I'm literally grinning in his ass, lapping at him, kissing and sucking on his sweet little rim like the fucking snack he is. I mean, I've ever had my ass eaten before either, but I can only imagine that it must be a luscious tickle based on the way he's writhing up to my mouth. I want to keep going, but I'm out of my mind already.

I need to get inside him before I end up coming all over the bed.

"Baby, grab the lube from underneath my pillow," I growl, with my mouth buried between his cheeks, kissing only a few more times before I sit back.

He hands me the lube, and I pour a bunch out onto my fingers, swiping them over his hole. I feel him clench at my touch and I let out a jagged breath, tugging my dick to get it nice and wet.

"Do you know…" I rasp, yanking his hips up until he's on his knees, "how much I've been *dying* to fill you with my cock again?"

He peeks at me over his shoulder. "As much as I've been craving it?"

Draping my chest over his back, I grab his jaw while my cock slips and slides between his cheeks. "Craving what?" I kiss him, gliding my tongue into his mouth.

“You…” he breathes shakily on my lips. “Your dick filling me. You… *fucking* me.” He gulps, and I hum.

“Once wasn’t enough, was it, beautiful?”

He shakes his head. “No. I don’t care about anything else when you’re riding my ass with your big cock.”

I shiver so hard, I’m almost convulsing. “Baby, you’re ruining me…” I draw my hips back, guiding up to his hole.

“Now you know how I feel,” he purrs.

Resting my forehead in his hair, I work against his body’s resistance, nudging my crown into his ass until the lube helps it slip inside. He whines out a hoarse noise that drives me crazy, baring his hips against mine while I feed inches of my cock into him. Stretching him around my girth, driving in slow until my pelvis taps his cheeks.

“You’re so *tight*, Kyran…” I croak, building up shallow pumps within the searing hot grip of his body. “Your ass is sucking my cock.”

“Mmm… Mmmffuck *so good*.” His lips tremble nonsense, arms shaking as he holds himself up. “Fuck me, Avi… *Hard*.”

“Are you sure?” Chills sheet my flesh, my heart hammering into his back while I draw out slowly, then slide back in. *I can’t even comprehend how fantastic this feels…*

Sex has never felt like this before… It’s *never* been as good as it is with him.

“Yes.” His face falls forward into the pillow. “Fucking wreck me.”

“Whatever you want, baby.” I grab onto his hips, tugging my cock out almost all the way, then slamming it back in hard. He sobs into the pillow, like maybe it hurt. But his entire body is quaking as he stretches his arms out above his head, fingers grasping at the sheets like he’s all sensation. “I’ll give you anything you want, just *please* don’t take this ass away from me…”

I don’t know what I’m saying… I can’t seem to control the things flowing from my lips while I’m driving into him like this, holding him still and fucking into him deep.

“It’s yours,” Kyran whines, much to my surprise, moaning and whimpering as my cock works in and out of the hot, slick, tight channel of his ass. “I swear… *nothing* feels like this.”

“So this is better than your fingers?” I grunt, pumping harder and *harder*.

“Ffuuck yes. So much… *better*.”

The slapping of my skin against his mingles with our collective groans and broken gasps, and the creaking of my bed frame to make the most illicit music I’ve ever heard. It sounds like someone’s getting turned the fuck out, which is exactly what’s happening, and I love it way too much. I’m dripping with sweat from how hard my muscles are straining, fucking and fucking and *fucking* him until I’m about to come and collapse at the same time.

Lifting a hand from where my fingertips are bruising his hip, I reach around to tease his dick, which is as hard as a metal pole and jamming into the bed. He shivers and clenches on me, the feeling driving me to play with him some more, squeezing his balls and fisting his cock. There’s so much precum spilling from him, his dick is soaked. Swiping some on my fingers, I bring them up to his lips and push them inside his mouth.

“Taste that?” I whisper while he greedily sucks on my fingers. “Only *I* make you do this…”

“Mmm,” he hums in agreement.

“That’s from my dick in your ass, Kyran.”

He nods frantically. Ripping my fingers out of his mouth, I grab him by the throat and haul him up until his back melds with my chest. His fingers dig into my thighs, and he grinds against me, taking over the thrusts by bouncing up and down on my cock.

“Fuck yea, baby… Ride me,” I growl in his ear, sucking the lobe with my hand still around his throat, the other on his chest, toying with his nipples.

“Why do you feel so good…” He writhes against every inch of my cock buried deep in his ass. “I can’t believe how good this feels… *Fffuck*, Avi, I love your dick.”

“That’s your secret, isn’t it, baby?” I brush my fingers down to where his cock is slapping against his abs with his frantic movements. “Superstar Kyran Harbor loves a big dick in his ass?”

He nods again, resting his body weight on me as he rocks himself up and down, that tight hole stroking me so good, I’m about to burst. “I’m gonna fffucking… *come*.”

“Say it,” I hiss, squeezing his throat harder. “You can’t come until you say it…”

“*Fuck me*, I love it…” he cries, all of his muscles tightening. “I love a big dick in my ass…”

Circling his nuts with my thumb and forefinger, I grip them hard until he chokes. “Whose?”

“*Yours*, Avi. I love *your* big, hard dick fucking my ass.”

“You wanna come on your stepbrother’s cock?”

“Yesss, *please*,” he gasps.

“Is your warm, tight hole gonna suck out your stepbrother’s come?”

He sounds like he can barely breathe, whining the strangled words, “I want it… I want my stepbrother to drain his balls deep in my ass.”

Jesus, his filthy fucking mouth is gonna make me come… “I’m there, baby,” I tell him as my balls tighten and I fuck up into him rough, *animalistic* in the way we’re slamming our bodies together. “Come for me, gorgeous.”

“I’m coming for you…” His entire body shudders, and he groans out loud.

Pulses of slick orgasm shoot up from his cock, hitting him in the chest and flowing down his muscles. I’m watching it happen over his shoulder, mesmerized at how fucking sexy he looks when he comes.

He *is* so beautiful… Gorgeous and perfect… and *mine*.

Kyran’s body slumps forward, and I hold his cheeks open, watching my dick disappear into his ass as my own climax pulls me over the edge. And I begin throbbing inside him.

“Fill me, Avi…” he whimpers, reaching underneath us to massage my balls, fingers tracing where we’re joined. The feeling keeps my orgasm going on for longer than I thought possible. And my thrusts don’t stop chasing it, pushing my cum into him as deep as I can get it.

“God, I fucking *love* coming in you…” I groan, my voice all hoarse and shaky. I lean over his back, our slick muscles sliding together while I rut into him, milking it all out. “You’re so perfect the way you take it, baby.”

“Keep going…” he pleads quietly. “Keep fucking me.”

My brain is hazy as I give him what he wants, stroking my dick in him until it begins to soften. I don’t even understand it, but he can’t get enough, mewling and gasping the entire time, like he might be having multiple orgasms… Which I didn’t even know was possible for guys.

I know he would hate to hear this, but I think Kyran is a power bottom. Seriously… Whether he likes it or not, he was *made* to take dick in his ass.

But then something unwanted pops into my head… An image of him with someone who isn't me. Pictures of him giving his ass to other guys are swarming my mind, and I hate it. It makes me want to retch.

Pulling out, I flop down onto the bed beside him, and he collapses with a breath, stretching out his limbs. I struggle to swallow the ickiness climbing up my throat, focusing on running my fingers along his bicep while he rolls onto his side, blinking at me. My hat is half dangling off my head, so he pushes it off the rest of the way. And I have no freaking idea what makes me do this, but before his arm pulls away from me, I press a kiss onto his wrist.

He stares at me for a moment, eyes glazed from the orgasm, hair all tousled around. He looks *amazing*, and I really hate it. I hate how good he always looks, and how I can't help but fixate on it. I hate how I just know that *everyone* fixates on it, and it's only a matter of time before he decides to… branch out and let other people see him the way I am right now.

"Are you going to run away again…?" I whisper, gliding my fingers down to the bruises already forming on his hip.

"Would it matter?" He chews on his swollen bottom lip. "I'll just show back up…" His eyes fall from mine while I fall into the spell of his Adam's apple sliding in his throat. "I can't stop…"

"Then stop trying," I hum, going for broke and sloping my calf over his, nestling into him. Kissing his neck, shoulder, arm…

"But I have to." He pulls back, sitting up like he's about to bolt.

I sigh out of frustration, and some sadness I wish wasn't there, dropping my face into the pillow. "You *don't*… But whatever."

The feel of his fingers tracing mine curls my neck, and I peer up at him.

"Avi… I need you to know that I'm really sorry about what I said earlier," he mumbles, in a tone I haven't heard from him all that often. Sincerity, and regret. "I didn't mean any of it, I was just…"

"Being an asshole." I smirk, and he chuckles.

"Yea," he sighs, nodding slowly. "A huge, obnoxious asshole."

"Well, at least you can admit it," I breathe, wriggling myself closer to him.

"I still have to go, though." He inches away.

I shake my head petulantly. "No."

"Yes." He grins.

I walk my fingers up his thigh. "I'll only forgive you if you stay…"

“Avi, I can’t stay here.” His tone grows a little firmer, the seriousness pulling my eyes up to his.

“Because you’re afraid of someone seeing you leave in the morning…”

He swallows, but doesn’t respond.

I know I’m going to regret asking this, but I can’t help myself.

“Don’t you want to know what this looks like when it’s not hidden away in the middle of the night?”

He stares at me for a moment in silence before rumbles, “I… I don’t know.”

Huffing out of pure despondence, I flop onto my back. “Fine. Bye, Kyran. I’ll see you next time you decide to swing by.”

“Why are you being like this?”

“Because.” I sit up fast. “You *were* a huge, obnoxious asshole to me today, Kyran. And then you showed up, and I should have told you to fuck off. But I didn’t…” I gulp. “Because I can’t.”

He blinks at me. “Don’t be mad…”

I shake my head. Do I even know *how* to be mad? Do I know how to act around people who make me feel the way he does?

No. The answer is fucking *no*, because this is the first time I’ve ever experienced it.

He leans in, softly kissing my lips. But it’s over too quick, and he’s pulling away when I want to be sinking in *deeper*.

“I’ll see you later.”

He gets up, bringing his clothes with him into the bathroom. And I just flop back down into the bed, covering my face with the pillow to distract myself from the fact that he’s in there, and he probably didn’t lock the door again.

And my pillow smells like him. *My whole damn bed smells like him.…* Like amber and honey and something citrusy I can’t place...

Oh, shit. Flinging upright, my face tilts in the direction of my camera, which is still recording. I shake my head and get up, turning it off.

Once again, I forgot we were filming. Because the *Fans* is seeming more and more like an afterthought lately.

“Avi!” Kyran’s voice roars from inside the bathroom, and I press my lips together.

Guess he finally noticed the hickeys.…

He comes storming out in his boxers, fuming, and it's a struggle to keep from grinning, or admiring how incredible he looks decorated in my little love bites.

"Are you fucking serious?!" he hisses.

"What's wrong?" I play dumb, giving him a few innocent flutters of my eyelashes.

"You know I'm a football player, right?" he seethes. "I have to strip down in front of other guys in the locker room…"

"That sounds fun." I allow a teasing smirk out, and it clearly enrages him further.

"This isn't funny!" he barks. "How am I going to explain this??"

Stepping over to him, I assess the marks on his chest, and his abs… leading down into his boxer briefs. "Just say they're from a girl." I shrug.

"They're on my ass," he growls, and I slap my hand over my mouth to keep the chuckles in. "Along with these nice fingerprint bruises!" He tugs his boxers down a bit, and now I kind of feel bad.

I don't really regret marking him the way I did… He deserves it for being an asshole earlier. But still, he has a point. *It might be difficult to claim a girl did that.*

Tracing the marks with my finger, I hear him exhale, and my eyes slide up to his. "It's *really* sexy, though…"

His visible anger slips away, and he blinks at me, parting his lips like he's going to say something. But then his chin dips, to where Robin is rubbing herself on his legs. I have to grin, because it's pretty cute. She's comforting him when he's upset, just like she does to me.

Kyran looks like he doesn't know what to do with her, glancing at me with his brow cocked. "What's its name?"

"Robin." I bite my lip.

He squints down at her. "Why *Robin*?"

"Because she's my sidekick," I tell him. He peeks at me. "I'm Batman."

A laugh bubbles out of him, and I feel like the inside of my chest is on fire. "Cute. Is one of Batman's *moves* to leave hickeys all over his enemies? I don't remember reading that in any of the comics…"

I didn't know he read Batman… Interesting.

Chuckling, I tilt my head at him. "Could be one way to defeat you…"

"And which villain am I?"

Curling my fingers around his hip, I lean in to his ear. “I’d say you’re Mr. Freeze… Because you’re *ice cold*.”

He swallows, and I melt our warm flesh together, kissing his neck slowly while he whispers, “Am I…?”

“Not always.” My hand runs up his chest. But before I can continue with my shameless attempts at getting him to stay, he pulls away.

“I have to go, Avi.” He gives me a look like he’s not really sure if he *wants* to, and it’s starting to rip me up a little.

I just nod—it’s all I can do—as he wanders back into the bathroom, getting dressed quickly.

On his way out the door, he stops to look over his shoulder. His eyes drop to the cat, and he says, “Bye, Robin.” Then he aims those pretty orbs of awed hazel at me and whispers, “Bye, Batman.”

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CHAPTER NINETEEN

S4int_d1ck: You be Santa. I'll be the elf helping empty your sac.
BigDickBritBoy: @Backwardz_Cap @Not_Your_Baby Wanna collab? You both look like hard workers and I have two openings you can fill

Kyran

S*ooo…*

I spent the afternoon doing something I never in a million years could have predicted I'd do *willingly*…

I gave myself an enema.

Okay, before you judge me, just let me explain.

I was on Twitter, checking comments from the fans. *Engaging*, so on and so forth, per Avi's request. But then my curiosity won out, and I started checking the accounts of other OnlyFans creators, just to see what they do and what they're like online. If there are things I could maybe… learn from them. It was like *research*.

One thing led to another, and the next thing I knew, I'd fallen into a gay rabbit hole on Tumblr. I somehow wound up reading posts by gay dudes—specifically bottoms—who were describing their… *regimens*, for lack of a better word that makes this seem less bizarre.

I don't want to admit that reading this stuff made me feel like a total noob… But it did. So I decided to take some mental notes on how to make sure I never embarrass myself in front of Avi. Because he's my partner.

My *business* partner, I mean. *That's it.*

I'm not doing it for him, I'm doing it for myself. And the Fans.

I snuck off to the drugstore, incognito, with a hat pulled down so low over my face I could barely see as I purchased everything I needed. Then I

waited for Guty to leave, and proceeded to spend hours in the bathroom, grooming my… *undercarriage*, if you will, and giving myself an intentional saline enema.

No, it was not pretty, and no, *I don't wish to discuss the details any further.*

Suffice it to say, I'll be going into my next sexual encounter with my stepbrother prepared. It's all part of the lifestyle, I guess. And by *lifestyle*, I mean that of a gay porn content creator.

None of this is stuff I ever envisioned myself doing, but I'm really trying my hardest to dart past the hang-ups and admit that I enjoy working with Avi. I mean, the videos speak for themselves. Sex with him is epically better than any I've had before… And while I'm still wrestling with what that means exactly, for my identity, I think getting paid massive amounts of money to have mind-boggling orgasms is enough of a motivator for me to stuff down my inner doubts and insecurities as best I can. *For now.*

Outside of the business, things with me and Avi are still a little weird, and I'm not sure if they ever won't be. After all, how do you go through the kinds of things we've been experiencing together and not form some type of attachment? He sees a side of me that no one else has ever seen before, and as much as I want to keep hating him, because I feel like I *should*, I can't help that the resentment is slowly wearing off.

I'm starting to feel like the attention from the fans is just a bonus… And the real attention I'm craving is from the one person I always told myself I hated.

It's extremely concerning, for a lot of different reasons, the main one being that this was never supposed to be about me and Avi. It's supposed to be about *money*, plain and simple. But the other night, it didn't dawn on me until I was back in my own dorm, in bed and trying desperately to fall asleep, that we'd been filming the whole thing.

The camera might as well not even have been there.

And that's a problem. Because I'm *not* gay, and Avi is my stepbrother. I shouldn't be doing what I've been doing with him in the first place, but the second we lose sight of *why* we started doing it, this turns into a much bigger problem…

A life-altering one.

I don't want to think about confronting this stuff. My goal since I was twelve years old has been to stuff it all down. *Avoid, distract, deny.* That's

how I cope… The only way I'm even surviving the endless inner torment known as my life.

I don't think I can juggle these two completely different versions of myself…

Are either of them the real me?

Who even am I??

As chaotic as all of these thoughts are, they're just adding to the stress of my current predicament. I'm packing a bag right now, preparing to go home for the holidays.

Christmas break is *supposed* to be fun. I'm sure most other students are looking forward to spending the holidays with their families, opening presents, sipping hot cocoa, talking and laughing and being normal.

But not me. I'm filled with mortal dread as I remove clothes from my travel bag and stuff in new ones. We just got back last night from a playoff game in Mississippi, where we defeated Ole Miss twenty-four to seventeen. It was a tight win… Their defense was on us like glue, and we only made it by the skin of our teeth. I refuse to admit that my head was elsewhere, but I was having trouble concentrating just a little.

And now I'm being forced to spend an entire week in that house I worked my ass off to escape from, with my miserable father, my suffering stepmother, and the guy I've been having secret gay sex with for money, who also happens to be my stepbrother.

If anyone has a vial of poison they'd like to slip into my coat pocket, now's the time.

Guty left early this morning for his flight back to Nevada, so I'm just sort of lingering around in the dorm. *I still have a few hours to kill before I need to leave…*

Pulling my phone out of my pocket, without even knowing why I'm doing it, I open my text messages and type a new one.

Me: Hey… You wanna hang for a few before we go home?

My foot is tapping rapidly on the floor while I chew my lower lip, pretending like I'm not watching the screen out of the corner of my eye for the moment he reads the message.

Five whole minutes pass, and eventually I shake my head, feeling like an idiot as I open the Uber app. But just as I'm about to order it, a text pings.

Avi: Yea, that would be cool.

Avi: Come over. And bring burgers ;)

Rolling my eyes, I stuff my phone away and grab my stuff, heading for the door. The walk to his dorm is less than five minutes, during which I'm pulling the collar of my coat up around my neck to avoid the cold. When I get inside and up to his floor, I let out a breath before knocking. I'm feeling all manners of jittery while I listen to him clomping up to the door.

He whips it open, the elated grin slipping off his face when he sees me.

"Why are you frowning?" I push past Avi into his dorm, and he closes the door behind me. "Expecting someone else?" I cock my eyebrow at him while shrugging out of my coat.

"I asked you to bring burgers, and yet here you are, burger-free." He sidles around me to the kitchen in his backwards cap and sweatpants, and I force myself not to spend one more second looking at his bare chest.

"I'm not DoorDash, bitch," I grumble, accepting the cup he's offering me. "If you want burgers, fucking order them yourself."

"Always a ray of sunshine." He smirks sarcastically, and I shrug, taking a drink.

I certainly need it to calm the hectic rapids crashing inside me from the fact that I'm here again.

I think it's clear that I'm not a *go-with-the-flow* kind of person. Sometimes I wish I was, but it's just not me. I haven't been optimistically easy-going since I was a kid. Everything I do in my life is intricately planned out and crafted to fit the image of myself I've created, to ensure I never get caught with my guard down ever again.

Or at least that's how it *was*… Until I started engaging in gay liaisons with my stepbrother for money.

And speaking of the money, it's been huge. We've brought in more than double from the last two videos than we made on the previous ones. And I have to admit, being able to see all of the hype surrounding the two of us with my own eyes, in real-time, threw a wrench into my original plan of cutting this thing off the second I had my housing payments.

Giving in to this situation is starting to feel like a *new* mask for me to wear. When I'm alone with Avi, I'm someone else. I'm playing a part, and whether or not it feels real is irrelevant. This version of Kyran Harbor finds solace in letting go of his control… Just a tiny bit. Just enough to distract him from reality, and the cavernous abyss of darkness inside.

He's not even Kyran Harbor at all… He's **Not_Your_Baby**.

“So, I was thinking…” Avi says, chewing on a red straw in his drink. “We should make my OnlyFans a joint account. People love couple’s accounts. And plus, I’m not really making solo content anymore, anyway.”

I’m listening to him, but my eyes are narrowed in on the straw he’s now biting chunks out of. “Is that a Twizzler in your drink?” He grins wide and nods. “What are you… eight??”

“Are you saying you’re not a fan of my childlike whimsy?” He smirks.

I stare at him for a moment before shaking my head. “You’re an idiot.”

His face slants while he gnaws on that damn Twizzler. “Why are you so tense?”

“I’m not tense…” I lie, feeling stupid for saying it because I’m obviously not doing great, the stress of all the bullshit in my life perched heavily on my shoulders.

“You want me to help you relax…?” His grin widens.

My stomach twists for some reason, and I force myself to appear unaffected by his offer… And not like I’m considering what that would be like just the tiniest bit.

“I’m good,” I huff.

He steps forward, inching closer until I can feel the heat coming off his exposed skin. “But you know I’m good at it…” Reaching out, he slips his finger through one of the belt loops on my jeans, tugging me into him.

I can feel my face flushing, but I stuff it down and shove him away. “Avi, stop fucking around. Let’s just… talk business.”

“But fucking around *is* our business.” He beams, and I roll my eyes. Surrendering his endless goofiness, he sighs. “Fine, sheesh. For someone who’s been having an abundance of toe-curling orgasms, you’re still awfully uptight.”

He eases around me, sauntering over to the couch and plopping down onto it, while I stand, fluttering in place and trying desperately to push away thoughts of him helping me *loosen up*.

Clearing my throat, I finish my drink, joining him on the couch. He has his laptop in front of him, and when I check the screen, I see that he has two windows open side-by-side. His OnlyFans and his Twitter.

Pulling up the details of his OF profile, he peeks at me. “So… joint account. Thoughts?”

I nod. “Yea. Fine. Whatever you think is best.”

“I’m not going to change the whole thing, but I’ll modify the description to reflect that we’re mostly just… collaborating. Together.” He gives me a twinkly look that spreads bizarre warmth in my chest.

Shifting from the overwhelming notion of this, I clear my throat and nod again. “’Kay…”

“’Cause I’m not… collaborating with anyone else,” he murmurs, eyes flicking to me in between tapping on his keyboard. “Are you?”

“No…” I whisper. “I don’t even want to be doing this with *you*… Remember?”

The words feel like acid on my tongue.

Avi’s lashes flutter at my face before he rasps, “Right. How could I forget…”

“I… I think that came out wrong,” I start to backtrack.

But he gives me a grin that looks a little forced and says, “Don’t worry about it. I know what you meant.”

My brow arches. “Do you?”

He shrugs. And now I’m even more confused.

What the hell are we doing?? None of this is making any sense…

When we’re alone together at night, fooling around for the fans, it feels like we’re something else. Two different people. I like the way it feels to be those people. But then I don’t feel like I’m *supposed* to, and it fucks me all up.

“Here.” His voice cuts into my worrisome thought. “Let’s make a post for the fans. To get them excited about the… merger.”

“Okay…” I blink while he goes back to the computer, typing out a new description. “What kind of post?”

Avi grabs his phone off the table, opens the front-facing camera, and aims it at us. Before I can even process what he’s doing, he slinks his fingers onto my jaw and tugs me to his mouth. I’m sort of startled at first, par for the course when kissing him, because it’s just so different…

I guess in theory it could feel like a girl’s mouth… Warm, with full, soft lips like fluffy pillows. But he’s more dominant than any girl I’ve ever kissed; the way his mouth advances on mine, as if he’s a settler exploring new territory and claiming it for himself.

He also does this thing where he bites my bottom lip, but in a gentle, erotic sort of way, tugging it between his teeth before grazing it with his

tongue, then brushing it inside my mouth to tease mine. It hypnotizes me; puts me in a trance, like when you hold a cat by the scruff of its neck.

He's a really fucking *great* kisser, but I don't think I can voice such compliments to him. Instead, I'm just shivering here, under the spell of his mouth while his hand glides down my chest, thumb flicking my nipple through my shirt until I whimper.

I hear the distinct sound of a picture being taken, and it snaps me out of it. My eyes open as he's pulling back, blinking hooded lids at me.

"See?" he breathes, his voice all gravelly. "The business can still… feel good."

What does that mean?? I'm so confused.…

I don't think I could speak if I had words to offer up. So I just sit quietly while he assesses the picture of us on the screen.

"Aw, this came out so good," he sighs, almost flippantly, the way you'd cheer over a great picture of a sunset.

Pursing my lips, and once again ignoring the heat in my face, I check the screen. The picture of us kissing brings on the same tingling thrill I've felt while watching our videos. It looks like a picture of two strangers; a *couple*.

A wave of unease crashes in my gut, mixing up with the excitement to make me sort of dizzy. But Avi is completely unaffected by it, as usual. He's just playing around on his phone, modifying the picture to blur parts of my face.

Squirming, I manage to conjure up some words as a distraction. "Why don't you blur your face?"

He glances at me, features going serious. "I'm not really sure…"

"If you had to guess…" I push on.

He purses his lips, thinking for a moment before he shrugs. "I guess I… like the attention. I like them fawning over me, as a *person*. And I mean, no one knows who I actually am. I don't use my real name or anything."

"But if someone who knows you sees it, then they could tell people," I rumble, spinning through sudden dreadful thoughts. "They could figure out that I'm in the videos with you…"

"I promise you, that won't happen," he says confidently.

"How do you know that?" I scoff.

"Just trust me, okay?" He reaches over, sliding his fingers through mine.

“Avi…” My voice creeps from within my throat. “Why are you holding my hand?”

His lips curl into one of those damn cocky smirks. “What’s wrong…? Is it making you uncomfortable?” I scowl and try to rip my hand away from his, but he holds on tighter. Leaning over my face, he whispers, “So, I can slide my cock in and out of your ass, but hand-holding is too intimate for you, *Kyran*?”

Burning flames of humility rush up my neck from his words, a hard throb happening between my legs. And he’s just chuckling at my clear discomfort, whipping up fury in my muscles.

“Stop fucking with me,” I hiss through clenched teeth, hating how he always does this.

Pisses me off and turns me on at the same time. It’s fucking bullshit.

There’s the annoyance. And here I thought it might have gone...

“But I don’t wanna stop fucking with you.” He breathes more rumbly chuckles over my mouth, hovering until I’m wriggling to get away from him. He finally releases my hand, but instead, slides his over my crotch, where my erection is stiffening up quick. “It’s *so* much fun.”

“Get off me, Avi…” I shiver at the sensation, wanting to fight against him, for my pride, but also desperately chasing the aching lust I can’t seem to overcome. It’s ridiculous. “I’m *not* your baby, and I didn’t come here to record content…”

Lies.

“Well, that’s just not true.” He grins on my ear, flicking it with his tongue until I shudder.

But then he quickly backs up, pulling himself off of me, and leaving me lying back on the couch with my pulse pounding between my legs.

Fuck him.

I sit up slowly, head twirling while he grabs his laptop. “I can give you the password to the OF if you want…”

“Not necessary,” I grumble, and he shrugs.

“Fine. But you need to put effort into this too.”

“I *am*. I made the damn Twitter and retweeted some of your posts. What more do you want from me?”

He gives me the side-eye. “You have to stay on top of it. Respond to people’s comments. Engage. It’s the best way for us to gain new subscribers.”

“Fine.” I roll my eyes stubbornly.

Leaning into his side, I scroll through the comments on our sex video clip he shared. I get the feeling he’s staring at me, but when I peek at him, his eyes are on the screen.

“Oh my God,” I grunt, stopping on one comment from a person with the handle **Fister_Jones1002**. “Did you see this??”

Avi laughs while I gawk, mortified at the comment, which reads:

Fister_Jones1002: Bottom is stunning. I would wreck that ass. *heart eye emoji*

Scrolling down, I gasp at another extremely perverse one, from **DaddyDom6969**.

DaddyDom6969: Can I meet you? Spitroast the blonde in half. *winky face*

“Jesus Christ…” I mutter. “Look at this shit.”

Peteypie7421: I wanna give you both a golden *shower emoji*

“What the hell is wrong with this person??” I shake my head, baffled by what I’m reading. There are hundreds of them, and they seem to get crazier the farther down you scroll.

“That’s people on the internet for you.” Avi chuckles.

“It’s fucked. Who just writes stuff like that to strangers??”

He shrugs. “Why are you surprised? It’s how creeps are online. This isn’t news.”

“Yea, well, I guess that’s why I don’t participate,” I huff, to which Avi scoffs and I glare at him.

“Yea right!” He cackles. “You practically live on Instagram. Always posting your little motivational quotes. *Hashtag blessed*,” he says mockingly, then rolls his eyes. “Please.”

I can’t help how my lips curve into a cunning smirk. “I didn’t know you followed me…”

He frowns. “I don’t. The dumb thing just won’t stop showing me your shit, even though I don’t care.”

“Right.” My grin widens. “Whatever you say, Insta-stalker.”

“Shut up,” he growls.

But now that I know how much this is getting to him, there’s no possible way I could stop.

Turning to face him, I murmur, “Do you even post anything on your account? Or did you make it for the sole purpose of secretly watching everything I do?”

“Don’t flatter yourself. You’re not that interesting…” he mumbles, visibly biting the inside of his cheek while he focuses on the laptop screen.

This is immensely satisfying.

“Oh, look,” he changes the subject. “Here’s a Jesus-freak telling us we’re going to burn in Hell for all eternity.” He points at the screen while laughing.

The amusement falls from my face in an instant, and my mouth goes dry.

I’m finding it hard to breathe all of a sudden, but I need to fight it. I can’t let Avi know I’m suffocating inside my skin.

“W-what… would you do about that?” I ask, struggling to sound normal, while I open my shaky hand and stare down at my palm.

Everything’s fine.

You’re here, and you’re okay.

Just focus on Avi’s voice.

It’s echoing a bit as he rambles about blocking the guy. But I latch onto it and pull myself out of the hole I’m falling into. I grab on tight and claw my way back up to the surface.

There’s Highland Ave, I think to myself, following the lines on my palm. *I used to ride my bike up and down here with my friends. And, look, it’s that place with the really great Thai food.*

Slowly, my heart rate evens out, and my breathing regulates. I peer at Avi, who’s still just laughing about how stupid people on the internet are, with no idea of the mini panic attack I just fought off.

I wonder what he would say if he knew… The truth.

When he notices I’m not laughing with him, his head whips in my direction, irises like deep fog shining at me. “Ky… are you okay?”

“I… I’m fine,” I mumble, urging myself to sound confident.

You sound like an idiot. He’s totally going to know something’s up.

Quick. Change the subject.

“We should really get going.” Standing up fast, I wander away, going for my phone in my bag, in an attempt to distract him from how cagey I’m being out of nowhere.

I’m sure he’s staring at me. I can feel it. But he doesn’t say anything.

He simply closes his laptop and stands up, tugging on a shirt as he chirps, “Okay.”

Ten minutes later, we're outside, walking up to the main road to meet our Uber driver. I can't help but peek at Avi while we trudge along, bag slung over his shoulder, wearing his standard ripped black jeans and black boots. His top half is covered by a black puffy coat, with a hot pink beanie resting atop his main of shaggy hair.

We seriously couldn't look more different… Me in my Burberry peacoat my dad got me for Christmas last year, Tom Ford boots, and my jeans fully intact. Light hair and pale skin to his olive complexion and messy dark strands in his eyes. He even has on fingerless gloves, displaying his perpetually chipped black nail polish.

But for some reason, our differences aren't irritating me like they normally do. Right now, I'm just walking beside him, wondering how it's possible that after all we've done together, and how many years he's been in my life, I still don't feel like I really *know* him.

Sure, I know the basic stuff. The things I've learned over the years of him being a reluctant member of the family. But Avi Vega himself… His history, the things he cares for and dreams about, the *real* stuff, beneath the surface… It's all a mystery to me.

"They said it's supposed to start snowing later…" he says, his breath visible in the cold air as he gazes up at the sky.

I just nod at the small talk, my head still cluttered with all these thoughts. We're both silent for a few steps, nothing but the sounds of our boots on the pavement clomping in my ears.

"So… how do you feel about the game?" He speaks again, and my eyes slink right.

"We could've played better." I shrug. "Their defense was no joke."

He nods. "But still… three touchdowns." He pauses while I squint at him. "You played really well, Ky. You should be less hard on yourself."

My lips twitch. "So you're actively watching all the games now? Paying attention to my performance…"

He rolls his eyes, and I chuckle. "I just want to make sure you're doing alright without me."

Scowling, I give him an unamused look. "Oh, you mean *your* performance?"

He laughs, and I smother the grin that wants to slip through. "Just admit it… You love having Baldwin there to pump you up."

I scoff, shaking my head. “Dude, I wasn’t lying when I said you’re a distraction.”

“Mhm… I think I know how distracting I can be.” He purses his lips over a smirk. And then his fingers brush mine.

I come to a fast stop, my pulse suddenly pinging inside me. Avi stares at me while my eyes fling left and right, making sure no one saw that.

There isn’t anyone around to see it, and I’m obviously freaking out over nothing, but I can’t help it. My skin is growing hot and itchy beneath my clothes.

“Sorry…” Avi whispers. “It was an accident.”

I clear my throat. “It’s fine… whatever.” Distracting myself from the way I can still feel his fingers on mine, I pull out my phone to check the app. “Says he’ll be here in two minutes.”

“Okay…”

I can feel him staring at me, but I’m too jittery to look up, so I busy myself with bullshit on my phone until the car pulls up along the road.

We both get into the backseat, our bags resting at our feet as the driver pulls away, taking us home. The radio is on, playing some Rihanna song at low volume while we cruise up 93. Looking out the window, I watch the buildings pass, listening to the grungy voice croon about love on the brain.

My chin slants left, slowly inching my face in Avi’s direction, where he’s gazing out the window himself. Then he peeks at me, and I quickly look away.

Weirdo. You’re being a total weirdo.

My mind is moving as fast as the car through the rest of the drive. And when we pull into the driveway of my home, the nerves are really churning my stomach something fierce.

The holidays have been terrible for as long as I can remember. When Hannah and Avi showed up, they actually became slightly more tolerable, pulling some of the focus from how little my father cared to celebrate with me. If I don’t make a point to stop by my mother’s house, we don’t see each other. And I haven’t seen my sister in years at this point. She opts not to come home, for obvious reasons… But I expect a phone call from her tomorrow. And despite everything, I’m looking forward to it.

I can’t help resenting Bridget a little for leaving me alone with Dad. She disappeared when I needed her, and it’s hard not to feel hurt and abandoned over it.

Of course, I understand *why* she left… I just wish she hadn't.

The house is quiet, but there's music coming from the den, so Avi and I walk that way, following the sounds of a crackling fire and hushed voices.

"My boys!" Hannah cheers the second we set foot into the room, jumping up to greet us both. She clings to Avi for way too long, kissing his face all over while whining, "Oh, I missed you so, *so* much, my precious tatala."

"Mom…" he grumbles, scrunching his face as he tries to pull away from her affections.

It has me chuckling, because honestly, it's really sweet, and embarrassing for him, which is fun.

"Kyran, I'm so happy to see you." Hannah hugs me tight.

I'm still always surprised by the affection, so it takes me a moment to return it. But I do, because it's nice. It feels good to be welcomed by family. *I really wouldn't know what that's like…*

When I pull back from Hannah's warm embrace, my eyes flit to my father, who's standing there, a perfectly indifferent smile on his lips as he steps over to us.

"Good to see you, son," he says firmly—*as usual*—giving me a two-second hug with a stern pat on the back. "Great game the other day." Then he turns and mumbles, "Avi."

He goes to squeeze Avi's shoulder, which is the most sentiment he can expect from my father. But Avi lunges at him, hugging onto him hard enough that my father is almost knocked backwards. I'm pretty sure Avi's doing it on purpose, to mess with him, which has me stifling a laugh.

"Boys, I'm making a roast for dinner tomorrow," Hannah says as she curls up on the couch. My father takes a seat at the other end. "So we figured we'd just order takeout tonight."

"Chinese??" Avi gasps excitedly, to which Hannah grins and nods. "Sweet." My brows furrow at him, and he explains, "It's our Chrismakkah tradition."

"Right…" I chuckle. "I forgot about *Chrismakkah*."

I learned about that during the first Christmas Avi and Hannah spent with Dad and me. It's a Vega family tradition to celebrate both Christmas and Hanukkah, since Avi is half-Jewish.

"How could you ever forget about Chrismakkah??" He feigns outrage. "It's the epic battle between Jesus and Moses!" He cackles at the look of

horror on my father's face. "Just kidding. It's not a *battle*. It's just seven fun days, leading up to the eighth *super* fun day. Which this year, just so happens to also fall on Christmas Day."

"Convenient," Hannah teases with a smirk.

"Alright, well… I'm gonna bring my stuff upstairs," I mutter.

"Oh, yea. Good idea," Avi says, following me to the stairs.

"We'll eat in about an hour!" Hannah calls after us.

Stomping into my old bedroom, I exhale slowly, looking around. It's exactly the same as I left it, but for some reason, it *feels* different. I don't know if it's because I've changed… or because I never really felt like myself living in this room.

It won't be like it was…

I drop my bag on the floor, taking off my coat and boots, trying to make myself comfortable, when really, I'm just anxious. Being around my father is always tense, but during the holidays, it really ramps up the pressure… For me to feel like a better son than I am. Constantly chasing his approval, and knowing I'll never get it.

Taking a seat on my bed, I flop onto my back, staring up at the ceiling. I still vaguely remember what holidays were like before our family was torn apart…

It wasn't perfect… Not even close. But still, it was better than this. Christmas movies, decorating the tree, and sipping eggnog by the fire. Bridget and I would rush downstairs at the crack of dawn and squeal over all the presents everywhere, and the plate of cookies with a bite taken out from Santa. There was honest to God *merriment*.

And then that all changed.

A few words shivered from terrified lips took down the whole Harbor family.

A knock at my door brings me out of my anguished nostalgia.

"Hey…"

Lifting my head, I find Avi wandering into the room, hands stuffed into his pockets. He trots over and plops down on my bed right next to me, and for the first time *ever*, I don't actively try to scoot away from him.

Maybe I'm just too tired… Emotionally drained from the sheer act of being here, and all the bullshit memories that always seem to attach themselves to this stupid holiday. But right now, I almost feel myself

leaning in *closer* to him. Hanging on his proximity, as the only thing in my life that fully distracts me from chaos my mind can't control.

Avi lies down on his back beside me. And we both just stare up at the ceiling, side-by-side, breathing quiet breaths that feel much calmer than they were a moment ago. The feel of his fingers moving alerts me to how close they are to my own. And then mine move, twitching subtly until they brush his.

I hear him release an exhale, and the next thing I know, his fingers are tracing mine, gradually grazing them up and down.

The sensation thumps my chest and tickles my stomach, but I don't… I don't hate it.

Latching onto that, and this feeling I don't want to lose no matter how confusing it is, I thread mine through his, taking his right hand in my left. We're *holding hands*, and it feels *good*. His hand is warm and big; the same size as mine. I like it…

I like his hands.

Avi's face turns, and as nervous as I am for him to see the obvious blush in my cheeks, I shift mine in his direction. Our eyes meet, two vastly different places on the color spectrum, cradling each other, almost intimately.

"I wanna show you something," he whispers, lips quirking subtly.

Brows raised, I blink at him as he reaches his left hand into his pocket, pulling out some sort of rubber ring. He flicks it at me, and it lands on my stomach. Picking it up with my free hand, I examine it closely.

"What the hell is this?" I grunt, and he chuckles.

"It's a cock ring." I shoot him a scandalized look, and he laughs harder. "A gift from one of our fans."

I observe the ring for a moment, so many varying things bouncing around inside my skull. But the first question that exits my mouth is, "You gave a stranger on the internet your address??"

Avi snorts, his chest rumbling through his chuckles. "I gave them Frankie's address."

"That doesn't exactly make it better," I gasp. "What if this person shows up at her house?"

"I didn't give out her apartment number or anything," he sighs. "Plus, her building is very secure. She said it was okay."

The only other word I can think to utter is, "Why…?"

He grins, shrugging. “He wanted to send us something for Christmas. I thought it was sweet.”

“Sweet… or creepy?” I mutter, squeezing the rubber between my fingers.

He rolls so that his whole body is facing me. “You’ve seen the DMs from these people, Ky. They’re smitten with us.” I blink at him. “And by the way, it’s not the only gift we received. It’s just the only one I could… bring with me.”

My chin can’t seem to stop swiveling, flabbergasted by what he’s telling me, while he just continues to laugh softly.

“I guess we’ve really made it, huh?” I mutter sarcastically, though I can’t help feeling flattered by it…

People sending us gifts because they like what we do so much, they want to feel like they’re a part of it. Sure, it’s primarily sexual, but still. If I’ve learned anything in the last couple of months, it’s that whether you want to admit it or not, sex is a huge part of human life. It’s *connection* in a lot of ways.

Even… uninhibited chemistry that pops up when you least expect it.

The periwinkle of Avi’s eyes falls to my lips, and I’m suddenly so much warmer.

“I want to kiss you, Kyran,” he says quietly, his fingers squeezing mine.

Instinctively, my eyes fling to my bedroom door, which is open. “You shouldn’t…”

“I *really* want to…” he murmurs.

“But it’s not…” My voice gets lodged in my throat, and I clear it, lowering to a whisper. “It’s not a good idea.”

“Why not?” He inches closer to me.

“Because…”

I can’t even think. My mind has gone completely blank and all I can feel is warm, thrumming need, seeping from my pores like a pheromone.

Avi touches my chest, dragging his fingers dangerously close to where my heart is flying like crazy. “Why this time, Ky? Give me a good reason, not one of your bullshit excuses.”

Gulping down the saliva filling my mouth, my eyes leave his for one more second to peek at the door. “Because our parents are right downstairs.”

He hums a deep, rumbly sound, and now it’s all I can hear as his hand reaches up to my jaw. “Then I guess we’ll just have to be *really* quiet.”

He tugs me to his mouth, and to my own surprise, I give right in, curving my body to his while his lips seal over mine. It’s hypnotic, the way he kisses me; dizzying, like I’m standing at the very edge of somewhere high off the ground.

His kiss is altitude, lifting me up past my normal center of gravity.

Our shared breaths are the wind, rushing in pants and whimpers… And his hands clutching and hauling me closer are what keep me from floating away.

He’s kissing me, and I’m *flying*.

But I’m so afraid of falling, I can’t stop the trembles.

“Avi…” I mumble in between the fevered sucks and licks and bites, my hands on his chest while he eases himself on top of me.

“Mmm…” He grinds his hips into mine, my legs spreading for him like a reflex.

“We should… close the… door.” My words leave broken and hoarse from the arousal he’s dragging out of me; the overwhelming, but surprisingly erotic dominance in his lips, his teeth, his tongue, his hands… all working together to mollify me, and turn me into a subdued little kitten.

“Don’t make me stop,” he growls with my jaw in one hand while the other slides up inside my shirt. “I don’t want to leave your perfect lips for one second…”

“I know,” I whisper into his mouth, humming when his fingers tease my nipple. “But please… Just close it. For me?”

Avi pries his lips from mine, breathing heavily like he’s trying to find his way back to earth as he nods. Rolling off me, and off the bed, he stumbles over to close the door gently, locking it with a click. He spins to face me, biting his lip, pinning me with a look that throbs my balls and rushes blood to my dick so fast, I feel woozy.

Sauntering over, he lifts his shirt over his head, tossing it as he drops onto the bed on his knees, crawling back over me like it’s where he’s meant to be. It feels like we’re magnetized to one another and I’m as nervous as I am turned on by it.

Why does this feel so good…? And why does it happen as easily as breathing?

He presses a few more slow kisses on my mouth, grasping the hem of my shirt and dragging it up slowly to reveal my torso. “Arms up,” he commands softly, and I obey, raising my arms over my head so he can remove my shirt.

“Do you think they’ll notice…?” I murmur while he kisses down my throat, trailing his lips along my chest. “That we both disappeared up here together instead of spending time with them?”

“I don’t think either of them expect you to want to *socialize*.” He kisses one of the purple marks he left on me the other night.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” I peer down at him, narrowing my hooded gaze. “And thanks again for those. I had to lie and say they were from Lexi.” Avi chuckles, sucking and biting me some more until I grab him by the hair. “No more hickeys…”

“Mmm… but you wear them so well.” He flutters his tongue over my nipple while working on undoing my pants.

It feels *amazing*. Honestly, I can’t even force myself to act upset about the awkwardness of being draped in mouth bruises in front of all my teammates while he’s sucking on me like that.

“And little do they know, these sexy little marks are from your *stepbrother*…” He breathes warm, illustrious words on my skin, making me shiver. “What would our parents say… if they found us like this?”

He shoves my pants and underwear down, enough that half my dick is exposed. And I’m breathing heavily, burning from the rush of his words. Because he’s right… It’s forbidden, what we’re doing. Letting him toy with me, with our parents right downstairs. I can’t even help how badly it makes my cock weep.

Avi opens his own pants, pulling his dick out and giving it a few tugs while lowers mine even more, bringing them down my legs until I’m naked. He removes his phone from his pocket, turning on the camera and handing it to me.

“Capture this moment, gorgeous,” he rasps, nuzzling my balls with his lips, kissing them before swiping his tongue up the length of my cock.

“*Ohh*… fuck yes…” My head drops back, hips lifting to his hungry mouth while he sucks me in, doing that thing I love where he teases the skin around my head with his tongue.

But then I remember the phone in my hand, and peek at the screen, aiming it to get the perfect angle of his dark hair, bobbing up and down on

me. I brush my fingers through the strands, tugging gently in my fist while I record him sucking my cock, slow and *deep*, his luscious pink lips stretched around my girth, sliding up and down.

"You suck me better than anyone…" I whisper, and he groans, vibrations rumbling my shaft inside his wet mouth. "We're not supposed to be doing this… are we?"

He shakes his head, spit running down the sides of my dick as he glides up, releasing me with a pop. "If they only knew what I was doing to you up here…"

"*Fuck*…" My head tips back again while he kisses down my pelvis, sucking roughly on my nuts, then moving on to bite my inner thighs.

"You love it, don't you?" His voice is deep and throaty, swimming in my ears as he grabs my thighs in his hands, shoving my legs apart forcefully and wedging his face in between. "Keeping this dirty little secret… Letting your stepbrother defile you with our parents right downstairs…"

My head moves on its own in a nod, because *yes*. Yes, I certainly do love it, despite what that means about me. I can't find it in myself to war against something that feels this good; swapping my infinite angst with intoxicating pleasure.

His tongue slides along the space between my balls and my ass, tauntingly poking between my cheeks while I shudder.

But he pauses, and my eyes creep open to find him squinting up at me. "Did you groom yourself?"

Heat rushes to my face as I bite my lip and nod.

Avi's dark lashes flutter for a moment, and he groans, "That is so fucking hot, baby… Were you thinking about how much you want my mouth down here…?"

I nod faster, gulping on the word, "Yes."

He sits up with a growl, snatching the phone away from me. "Bend over the edge of the bed."

"W-what?" I gasp, blinking at him, dazed.

"I wanna eat you until you come," he breathes, sliding off the bed onto his knees. "Like this."

"Can you… really do that?" My heart leaps wildly in my chest as I turn away from him, dropping my feet onto the floor and draping my top half over the bed.

“I’ve never tried…” He runs his hands up the backs of my thighs, cupping my ass hard while I whimper. “Do you wanna come with my tongue in your ass, Kyran?”

My dick leaks a heavy pulse of precum onto the bed as I breathe, “Yea… that sounds… fun.”

He chuckles seductively, spreading me open while I purr at the sensation of being on display and at his filthy mercy. “I’d grab that pillow.” His warm breath tickles my eager flesh. “You might need something to scream into…”

It’s baffling how much I fucking *want* this right now. I never thought I could be this turned on, bent over a bed with Avi staring at my asshole, but I can’t even pretend I’m not falling apart in anticipation.

His lips dance up the backs of my thighs as he presses soft kisses all over my cheeks, creeping closer and closer to the crack of my ass. Teasing, building the arousal, so that when he finally sinks his mouth in between, I’m already whining out jagged groans.

“Shh… Quiet, baby,” he whispers with a flutter of his tongue over my hole.

God, it feels insane. I can’t believe I’ve been missing out on something this dirty and delicious. *If I’d known how good it feels, I would have been letting everyone eat my ass.*

But then I’m glad Avi’s the one doing it… Because he’s *very* good. He says he’s never done it before, but he must really like it, the way he’s using his entire tongue to lick me like an ice cream cone. I *feel* his grunts and growls vibrating into me as he sucks my rim, kissing it over and over while I smash my face into the bed.

“Goddamn, that’s so good…” I mumble into the comforter, writhing my hips back against his face. “*Fffuck yea*… Stuff it inside.”

“Like this?” He spears his tongue into my hole, forcing it as deep as he can.

“*Ohh*… oh yea. Just like… *that,*” I gasp, unable to control my volume when something so slippery is pushing inside me, swirling around while his soft lips graze my sensitive, puckering flesh.

“Kyran… You have to be quiet.” He grips my ass in his hands. “Our parents are going to hear you.”

“*Fuuck,*” I whimper, my dick throbbing at the truth in his words.

It’s *wrong*… So *mischievous sinful dirty naughty* fucking *hot*.

Grabbing the pillow, I stuff my face into it to muffle my cries.

“You want them to come up and find us…?” he croons, attacking my ass with strong licks, slipping his tongue inside, then tugging it out. “You want them to hear how much you love your stepbrother eating your hot, tight little hole…”

“*Avi*… fuck yes. Eat me the fuck *out*…” I whine, biting down on the pillow while he uses his entire mouth to make out with my asshole the way he does to my face.

It’s sloppy wet. I can feel saliva running down my balls, and my dick is so hard it’s jamming aggressively into the bed while I rock my hips back and forth, riding his mouth, begging for more like a fiend.

“You’re so sweet, baby,” he breathes, unleashed in his devouring. He’s *starved* for it, viciously fucking his tongue into me. “Warm and wet and *delicious* for me…”

Fuck… fuck fuck fuck, holy fuck… I think I’m really gonna come…

Grinding my cock into the bed as hard as I can, I’m chasing the sweet friction, humping back against his face. I feel Avi jerking off, his arm tapping against my leg as he beats himself roughly, lashing me and sucking me until I’m going cross-eyed.

“That’s it, baby…” he groans. “Ride my tongue. Show me how badly you want it…”

“I want it…” I sob gruffly into the pillow, biting it to keep from screaming. My fingers are digging into the mattress as I bounce my ass on his tongue, my cock *aching* and ready to erupt. “I wanna come, Avi… God, make me *come*…”

“I’m gonna make you come so hard, you sexy little slut,” he growls. “Come for me, Kyran. Come on my mouth…”

My body is wound up like a rubber band curled way too many times around my fist. I’m about to snap, driving my ass down on his mouth until the world goes dark, and I tremor…

“I’m c-coming… Ffffuck *yes*!”

Shuddering down to my core, I crumble into a soul-shattering orgasm, tears seeping from my eyes as my dick shoots off, spraying cum all over the bed.

“Shhh… That’s so good, baby…” he purrs. “Come *so sweet* for me…”

I ride it out, milking the cum from my cock with my hips mashing against the comforter, crying unintelligible nonsense into the pillow.

“Avi… Avi Avi *Avi*… I’m… your… I’m *yours*.”

Thankfully, I don’t think he can understand what I’m saying, because it’s pretty crazy. But I can’t seem to stop it. Everything around me is toppling, and it’s just too intense…

“I *love* how you make me come… b—” I chomp down onto the pillow fast to shut myself up.

Avi’s rampant licking and kissing slows, and he pulls his face out of my ass, shoving me up onto the bed. I nestle up, buzzing while he crawls over me, straddling my waist. He’s still wearing his pants, but they’re down around his thighs, dick curled in his fist as he strokes it fast, pumping up and down, holding up the camera to record.

“I’m gonna come all the fuck over you, gorgeous.” His eyes are hooded, bottom lip between his teeth as he jerks harder and harder.

“Come on me…” I plead on a whisper, tipping my head back, awaiting his hot load.

“You want it?”

“I want it…” My chest quavers. I’m all sensation right now, my sticky skin flushed, nipples peaked and aching with the desire to be soaked in his orgasm. “Cover me in cum, baby…”

My eyes snap open. *Fuck, what did I just say??*

Avi’s eyes widen. His lips part and a desperate whimpering gasp leaves them before his head drops back, and he groans, “*Fuuck*… fuck me, Kyran, *Jesus*…”

I have no time to be horrified by what I just called him, because I’m being sprayed down by warm, slick pulses, hitting my chest and my neck, my chin.

Avi’s hand slows, and he milks out every last drop, chewing on his lip to keep himself quiet. At this point, I have no idea how loud we’re being. We could be screaming for all I know… My blood is rushing too loudly in my ears for me to tell.

Swallowing, I glance down at the silky wet splatters all over me, licking my lip and tasting some of him there, too. Our eyes meet, and Avi shifts himself up higher to stuff his dick into my mouth. I take it with a grunt, sucking him greedily, pulling out salty flavor into my mouth and gulping it back.

His fingers sift into my hair, petting me, holding my head while I lose myself in sucking him, bobbing on his cock until it begins to soften on my

tongue.

He tugs it out slowly with a shivering breath, dragging the swollen head over my lips and down my chin. Then he collapses on me, tossing the phone away while he kisses my mouth. Sucking at my lips, he teases my tongue with his, tasting himself.

My brain is a scrambled mass of static, the sexual haze we're wading in filling the room as my fingers tangle in his hair and I hold his lips on mine. Keeping us lost for as long as I can until this wears off.

Avi peels his mouth away, but only to kiss down my chest and suck his cum off of my nipples. The feeling jerks my cock awake, but I'm momentarily paralyzed.

Each time we're together, it gets deeper. More intense, more staggering, more… beautiful.

More terrifying.

"You called me *baby*…" he whispers, and I groan, covering my face with my hands to hide from the endless shit he's about to give me over that slip. He chuckles, wrapping his arms around my waist, dropping kisses on that sensitive spot by my ear. "And you said you're *mine*."

"Avi… Please shut up," I whine. "It was an *accident*. I was caught up in the moment."

"Okay, sure…" There's an elated grin in his voice, and I refuse to admit that it does things to my stomach… Fluttery things. "Whatever you say, grump. But I'll have you know that I'm not some *girl*," he teases, and I can't stop the chuckle that rumbles out of me. "I'm a *man*. And men don't let other men call them *baby*."

"You're so annoying," I grunt while he sits up, swooping his messy hair over to one side.

"I can't help but notice you don't freak out when your friend Guty calls you *baby*, or *sexy*." He narrows his gaze at me, and I mirror the look.

"That's because he's not doing it in a romantic, pet-name kinda way," I huff. "It's just how he is. He calls everyone stuff like that."

He purses his lips. "Are you sure…?"

My head tilts, and I notice something in his features that isn't quite kidding around. He seems a little serious… maybe even… *jealous*.

Is he jealous of Guty?? Why would he be? I've never hooked up with Guty. He's just my friend, and he's straight.

My stomach flops while I swallow. *And so am I…*

I inch closer to Avi. “You know I’ve never… hooked up with any other guys… Right?”

He gnaws on his lip for a second. “I do now.”

“Have you?” My gut bunches like it’s preparing for a hard blow.

But he shakes his head, and whispers, “No.”

Letting out a secret exhale, I nod. And we both just stare at each other for a few heavy breaths of tense silence.

“Does that make you happy?” he asks quietly.

Yes. “No. I mean, I don’t *care*…” I grumble. “I’m not going to hook up with other guys… Because this is just about… the money.” I gulp out the words. His eyes are wide as I mumble, “Right?”

Avi is quiet for another few deafening seconds, during which I can *feel* the air in the room, like a shower of pelting rain coming down on us. I don’t know what any of this means. All I know is that it doesn’t feel like a business discussion anymore…

Is it even for the fans??

He shakes himself out of something, finally muttering, “Yea. Of course.”

My lips part, but he jumps off the bed before I can say anything, rushing toward the bathroom and calling out, “I’m just gonna clean up real quick, then you can take a shower. Or whatever you wanna do…”

“Okay…” I mutter.

And as soon as the bathroom door closes, I flop onto my back, staring up at the ceiling once more.

This room is exactly the same…

But I’m not. *Not even close.*

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CHAPTER TWENTY

SensitiveSwitch: Better to be an open sinner than a false saint.
Top_ofthe_mornin_toya: Not_Your_Baby if you ever need a new door mat, @ me. I swear I am very comfortable to step on
Twinkerbell: If anyone ever asks why I'm queer I'm sending them this video

Kyran

After I'm done showering—without wetting my hair, because I don't want it to *appear* that I've showered, in order to spare myself from having to potentially answer questions about *why* I showered—Avi is nowhere to be found.

I assume he's hanging out with his mom, and when I slowly march back downstairs, stowing the awkwardness as best I can, I find that I'm right. Hannah and Avi are in the kitchen, sorting through Chinese takeout containers, grabbing plates and silverware. I'm not sure where my father is, but it's probably safe to assume he's off somewhere sipping whiskey and trying his best not to *completely* embody Ebenezer Scrooge.

Puttering around the corner into the kitchen, I linger by the doorway until Hannah peeks up at me and smiles. My eyes shift to Avi for just a moment, and he glances up at me, his lips curving into a soft grin before he purses it away, busying himself with setting up the food.

"Can I just say how happy I am to see you two getting along?" Hannah's voice chimes, tearing me out of my self-loathing long enough to focus on what she's saying. "I always hoped you boys would finally start acting like brothers at some point."

Avi drops a fork, making a loud clank on the floor. "Sorry…" he mutters in a jittery tone that Hannah doesn't seem to notice.

I rush over and bend to pick up the fork, but he's already down there grabbing it. Our eyes lock, and I notice even more uncertainty shining in the grayish blue, concerning me just a tad.

I'm usually the bumbling moron when it comes to our secret fling, not him.

"Be cool, *bro*…" I whisper to him before we both stand up, and he nods fast.

"Yea," I mumble, responding to Hannah in an attempt to normalize this unnerving situation. "Having Avi on the team has been fun."

He cocks a dark eyebrow at me, and my shoulder jerks in a subtle shrug.

"I'm so proud of you for working so hard at that job, Aviel." Hannah rubs his back. Then she looks to me. "How have you been managing financially, Ky? Is everything alright? Because I've been working a lot more lately, so if you need some cash—"

"Not necessary at all." I shake my head, extending her an appreciative grin for even offering to share what little she has with me. "I'm fine. But thank you."

She smiles. "I can't believe you've found a way to balance work with school *and* your games. You're like Superman!" She chuckles, and I grin awkwardly, pinching the back of my neck.

Please don't ask how I've been making money… I literally can't think of any fake job that would make sense right now.

"He's not Superman, he's Mr. Freeze." Avi smirks, and I squint at him.

"Yea, well… as it turns out, Coach was able to help me get my grants to cover everything," I lie, fiddling with things on the counter. "So I only really need money for, like, food and stuff."

Hannah nods. "And you've been okay… with all of that?"

My mind is blank. I have no idea what to say, sifting through anywhere at all I could say that I got the money.

But then Avi cuts in, "Actually, I helped Kyran sell some collectibles online." I gawk at him, and he gives me a look I can hear, telling me to *just go with it*. "He had a bunch of old sports memorabilia that was worth a lot."

"Oh…" Hannah hums, showing me a sad smile. "Well, I'm sorry you had to do that…"

I wave her off. "It's fine. I… didn't need it."

This is so awkward. Can we change the subject, please??

“Alright, well, I’m starving!” Avi claps his hands together. “Let’s stop talking about money and eat already.”

“Good idea, sweetie.” Hannah rubs his arm.

He picks up the plates, eyes flinging to mine for just a second before he carries everything into the dining room. I step aside as he passes, like I’m afraid that if he gets too close, it’ll somehow become obvious that we’ve been humping. Hannah glances at me, tilting her head.

Forcing a smile, I grumble, “I’ll grab the rest of the food…” rushing over to pick up containers.

We’re setting everything on the table as Hannah calls out, “Tom! Dinner!”

Taking my usual seat, I’m really dreading this. I loathe forced dinners with my father as it is, but add the tension between me and Avi, and the whole thing is like a detonated bomb just waiting to go *kaboom*.

My dad stalks into the room, glass in hand—*called it*—and I distract myself by scooping orange chicken onto my plate. When I look up, Avi is staring at me. I tilt my head, and he tugs at the collar of his shirt, eyes dropping to my neck.

Peering down at my collar, I see that the V-neck of my sweater is revealing the very beginning of a purple bruise on my sternum. Otherwise known as one of the many hickeys he planted on me.

I quickly adjust my collar to cover it up, jaw ticking as I glare at him across the table. He bites his lip to subdue a tiny grin, eyes stuck on his plate as if he’s remembering something, and I *really* wish I could hear what’s happening in his thoughts.

Once my father has his food, we all dig in, the conversation remaining casual, which is a relief. Avi asks Hannah how things are going at work, and she tells us about that for a while, after which we talk football. Unlike Hannah, my father doesn’t seem too concerned with how Avi and I have been dealing with the lack of money. The only thing he wants to discuss are my stats and how I’m feeling about our next game against Ohio State.

But it’s fine. I’m used to talking football with him. In fact, I’m used to it being the *only* topic of conversation between us that doesn’t make me want to chew broken glass, so I’m good with recapping every second of this season if it means not having to branch out into anything less superficial.

Unfortunately, that doesn’t last for long. Because by the time dinner is winding down, he rumbles, “Are you planning to visit your mother

tomorrow?”

My muscles stiffen, instant irritation brewing up inside me at the thought. “Well, considering that she hasn’t even called me in, like, a year, I was thinking no.”

“She’s your mother, Kyran,” he states firmly, as if I didn’t know that fact. “You should at least stop by.”

“It’s not like she’s made me a priority in the last however many years…” I push noodles around on my plate. “She has a new family to worry about… A new kid to replace the one she wants to forget.”

“Kyran,” my father barks. “Enough. You know that isn’t true. You’re just being dramatic.”

Dramatic??

A memory tries to weasel its way up, but I blink hard to force it away.

“Why do you care, anyway?” I huff at him. “She left you, too.”

He pins me with a stern look, one that used to have me straightening in my seat, desperate to show him the Kyran *he* wants to see. But for the first time ever, it seems like I may have stopped caring about what he thinks of me.

“That’s neither here nor there,” my father mutters. “She’s family, and the holidays are a time for being with family.”

“Oh, really?” I turn in my chair to face him. “So did you invite Bridget home for the holidays, then? Since being with *family* is so important…”

“What has gotten into you?” he hisses, glaring at me with glassy eyes.

“Answer the question, Dad.” I stand my ground.

My father peeks at Hannah and Avi, who are both just staring nervously at us. “Your sister wants nothing to do with this family. She made that clear already.”

“Actually, if I remember correctly, she wants nothing to do with *you*,” I seethe through gritted teeth.

He drops his fork aggressively onto his plate. “Kyran, you are being beyond childish.”

“Whatever…” I roll my eyes.

“I’m going to midnight mass at St. Joseph’s tonight, and I think you should come with me.”

That gets me.

My fingers twitch as they curl around the edge of the table, my body stiffening in rage.

“Are you fucking serious??” I shoot fury at him through my eyes.

“Watch your language at this table,” he snaps. “It would do you some good… Get back some of the faith you’ve clearly lost.”

I’m teeming in a full-on wrathful episode as I growl, “That’s it.” Shoving my chair back, I stand up fast. “Fuck you and your *faith*,” I spit in his direction, turning away because I need to get the fuck out of this room before I lunge over the table and choke him to death.

“Kyran, wait,” Hannah pleads, pinning my father with a scathing look.

“Sorry… I’m not feeling very cheery right now.” I stomp away from the table. “Merry fucking *Christmas*.”

I rush toward the stairs, but the idea of going up into my room right now makes it even harder to breathe. *I need some fresh air… I need to get out of this house.*

So instead, I go to the front door, whipping it open and diving out into the cold night air. Stalking down the walkway, I’m fuming so hard I barely even notice that I’m not wearing a coat until a snowflake lands on me. More begin to fall, sprinkling the arms of my dark gray Henley.

Great. Snow. Another thing everyone thinks is pretty and special, but really, it’s just a big fucking mess.

On a mission to clear my head, I walk up the road, my thoughts a muddled mess of bullshit. Anger clenches my fists at my sides, echoes of screaming and fighting, people packing and leaving whirring up in my mind like a blender, creating a thick concoction of stifling hopelessness.

I walk for many minutes, making a giant loop around the neighborhood until my teeth are chattering and I can’t feel my hands. The devastation of it all is weighing on my shoulders. I can barely carry it anymore…

This terrible, awful truth I hold is so very exhausting.

Whether I feel different or not, it doesn’t matter. I can run from every person, every place that reminds me of my past, but it’s still always there.

Distraction, denial, avoidance… they don’t work.

Because I’m still broken inside, and nobody fucking cares.

Sniffling, my clunky steps shuffle to a halt while I gaze up my street. My hands are shaking as I pull my phone out of my pocket, snapping a picture of a lone streetlamp, illuminating the falling snow like glitter raining from the heavens.

My fingers are numb, typing out a post for my Instagram while emotion crawls up my throat that I have to swallow and swallow and *swallow* to

keep down…

Silent night.

Biting my lip to stop its shivering, I'm about to post the picture when I hear footsteps. Then a deep, familiar voice that has my eyes falling shut… In relief, maybe.

Sweet, confounding comfort. *He's… here.*

"Ky…" Avi stomps over to me, and when my eyes open, I find him carrying my coat, opening it up to drape it over my shoulders. "Jesus, it's fucking freezing out here. How are you walking around with no coat on??"

"I'm… I'm s-sorry," I croak, stupidly, blinking hard to keep the pressure intact behind my eyes.

"No… Don't say that," he speaks firmly, holding my coat around my shoulders. His arms and the way his body is pressing into mine warms me, more than just on the surface. It feels like he's warming me *inside,* too. "Don't apologize for being out here. I'm just glad I found you…"

Peeking at him, I notice the snowflakes covering his shoulders and his hat… his eyelashes.

"H-how long have you b-been out here?" My words ride on shivers.

"Pretty much since you left," he sighs. "I just wanted to make sure you were okay." I blink at him, at the pinkness in his cheeks. "Are you? Okay?"

I'd love to lie, but I don't think I can. All I can do is shake my head. I can't speak, because I don't know what to say… I just don't *understand* why everything feels so much better now that he's here.

A snowflake lands on his upper lip and he licks it away. For some reason, it makes me chuckle… Just a tiny, amused noise puffing out into the frigid air.

Avi smiles, the first *real* Avi smile I've seen since earlier, in my bedroom, and it's like a shot of liquor running down into my gut.

"You wanna go back inside?" His fingers run up and down my arms like he's trying to warm me still. *Doesn't he know he's already done it…?* "Or we could keep walking around… if you want."

His eyes look so much bluer right now than usual, with only the dimmed streetlight gracing a soft glow to his features.

The fact that he would even offer to walk with me out here, in the freezing cold on Chrismakkah Eve, gives me enough strength to go back to the house. *As long as he's with me…*

“We should get out of the cold,” I mumble. “You look like you’re freezing.”

His mouth twitches. “Me?? Your lips are turning blue.”

I chuckle again, leaning into his side as he walks us up the street toward the house. And I can’t help myself… I’m breathing deep, bringing cold air into my lungs with the scent of him. Something in it pacifies me… poking at a familiarity in my mind I can’t quite reach. But I like it, either way. It wraps me up the way his arms do, like a big, fuzzy blanket.

When we get back to the house, everything is quiet once more. Avi gives me a look like he’s wondering if he should stay with me or give me space, and as much as my body is urging me to cling to him, I pull away gently.

“Thanks…” I murmur. “I’m just gonna go to bed. I’m really tired.”

I stalk toward the stairs as he whispers behind me, “Okay… Goodnight.”

Clomping up the steps, I rub some feeling back into my hands, caressing a line on my palm…

Our street, where he found me.

“Goodnight.”

Tossing and turning. Sweating through the sheets.

My dick is so hard it’s aching, brushing on the soft fabric and drawing out a whimper. A shadowed form appears in the doorway, and I feel like it’s Avi. I think it is, from the way my chest tightens and my stomach jitters at his presence.

He says nothing. Simply glides over to the bed and climbs in with me. And our bodies tangle, making stifling heat that burns like a million searing licks of flames.

You’ll burn in Hell for all eternity…

“I just want to be with you…” Avi whispers on my neck, grinding his body between my legs. “I want to make you *mine*.”

My throat dips as I swallow. It's scratchy and thick like maybe I've been screaming and crying, but I don't remember doing it. My back is stiff, and my muscles are sore…

I have rug burn on my knees.

Avi is touching me, but his hands feel different. They're cold, and I flinch when he runs his fingers between the crack of my ass.

"Beg for forgiveness…"

My eyes open, but all I see is dark. Blackness… An empty void of *nothing*.

"Avi…?" I call out while the hands touch me, harder and greedier… Aggressively pawing at me until I'm squirming to get away. "Avi, come back!"

I'm trying to speak, but nothing is coming out. I *hear* the words in my mind, but my vocal cords aren't working. There's an obstruction in my mouth…

A thumb with something wrapped around it. It tastes bad…

I hate it.

I hate this so much.

"*Stop…*" I cry, tears falling from my eyes as I scratch and dig to escape, but I can't fucking move. I'm stuck, like my body is frozen solid. Kneeling and subservient.

"You know who you are."

No. No, no, no, please. Please stop.

"This is you, Kyran. He made you this way…"

The hand draped in something uneven covers my mouth, and I fall away, into the abyss.

"No!" I gasp, shooting upright in bed.

Struggling for breath, I blink away the fog of my nightmare, gazing frantically around the room. When the veil lifts, and reality finally comes back into focus, I exhale shakily. I'm in my bedroom, and I'm alone.

"Fuck." I rub my eyes hard, brushing sweat-slicked hair away from my forehead.

I didn't miss those fucking dreams…

Sure, I still have them on occasion, but nowhere near as often as I did when I lived here. Under the same roof as my father and all of the lies he clings to. It's inescapable when I'm here. Like a monster that lives under my bed.

I glance at the clock on my nightstand. It's just after one in the morning. *He's probably still at his stupid mass…*

Scoffing, I shake my head, sliding out of bed to pad quietly over to the bathroom. I'm in there for a few minutes, splashing water on my face and gargling mouthwash to get the bitter taste of fear out of my mouth. But when I'm done, I find myself staring at the door on the right… the one that leads to Avi's room.

And my feet take me there, without a second thought.

Turning the knob, I push open the door just a crack, peering into the dark room. I find him right away, lying in his bed with his arms folded beneath his head, staring up at the ceiling.

His eyes flick to mine, and he sits up slowly. "Hey…"

"Sorry," I mumble, stepping into the room. "I couldn't really sleep."

"Yea…" He blinks at me. "I heard you yelling something in there…"

"Did I wake you up?" I ask remorsefully.

"Nah. I wasn't really sleeping anyway." I nod, shifting my weight in the middle of the room until he grins. "Kyran… come here." He pats the bed. "Keep me company."

I force a scowl to cover up a smile that feels way too eager as I wander over. "Fine. If you *insist*…"

Avi shakes his head, huffing, "Stubborn idiot," while I crash down onto the bed next to him with a sigh.

He scoots over to make room, but not much. I lie on my back while he's on his side, facing me. And I know he's staring at me, so I peek in his direction.

"Are you alright?" he asks, dark brows zipped together in obvious concern for me.

It's almost suffocating, how effortlessly he notices that I'm not. And the idea that he might know… That he could figure out *why* I am this way has me gulping back every bit of emotion I can swallow, keeping the façade intact.

"Yea, I just…" I reply, as evenly as possible. "It was a nightmare. That's all."

Avi doesn't seem placated by my bullshit words. He nestles in closer to me. "So what's up with you and your dad?"

I stiffen. "What do you mean?"

“It’s like, ever since I’ve known you, you guys have had this obviously fucked-up relationship… I’ve always wondered what it’s about.”

“It’s not *about* anything,” I mutter the lie, hanging on to it with clutched fingers. “He’s just an asshole. He doesn’t really care about me…”

He made that clear when I was twelve, and he chose an image over his own son.

“But why?” Avi asks. “You’re, like, the perfect son.” I scoff, but he keeps going. “No, I’m serious. You’re smart as hell, great at school… A goddamn college football star on his way to the NFL. What could he possibly have to complain about?”

The room goes silent for several thick seconds before I say, “I broke up our family…”

“How??” His baffled gaze is hot on my face. “That doesn’t even make sense…”

“Avi, I don’t really want to talk about it,” I sigh tiredly. “Just be glad you have a parent who loves you unconditionally… No matter what you do.”

He’s quiet for a moment, and my gut is churning anxiously. But then his fingers slip up into my hair, and he brushes the strands gently. Closing my eyes, I let out a breath, loving the feeling and reeling from it at the same time.

“And your sister?” He speaks softly. “Where does she fit into all this?”

I swallow. “Bridget left because she couldn’t deal with it…”

“With what?”

“*Them*. My mom and dad, and their… blatant disregard for us.” Shifting onto my side, I face him, locking our eyes. “Everything we had was on the surface. Wealthy, tons of friends. That smiling family in church every Sunday, thanking *God* for all our blessings… But it was bullshit. It was an act. Faking shit only lasts for so long…” I blink, then mumble, “I guess.”

Avi’s eyes sparkle with inquisition. I can tell he wants more information, but thankfully he doesn’t pry. He just asks, “Are you mad that she left? Because you wanted to go too…?”

I bite down on the inside of my cheek. “I just miss my sister. I don’t blame her for leaving. I wish she hadn’t, but I get it.”

His fingers trail down my shoulder, onto my arm. “Why didn’t you go farther? For school, I mean. If you really wanted to get away from here…”

I breathe out slowly. “It probably sounds dumb, but I love Boston. This place is my home… I didn’t want to let the bad memories ruin it for me.” I pause, considering this. “Part of me regrets it… Or, I *did*. I used to…”

My eyes fall to where his chest is moving, breaths seeming to pick up with my subtle confession.

“Are you saying you don’t hate me as much as you used to?” His lips quirk, and I purse mine to keep from grinning.

“It’s slowly wavering.” A tiny one sneaks through, and he chuckles.

“Remember my eighteenth birthday?” He smirks, fingers gliding down to my hand. “How pissed off you were when you found out I was going to BC?”

I laugh quietly. “I remember kicking your ass…”

He gasps in outrage. “You wish! I schooled you.”

“In your fucking dreams.” I shove him gently.

But my hand stays on his chest.

And then it falls, slowly, down to his waist. The amusement disappears, and we stare at each other, breathing shallow as the warmth between our bodies swallows us up, closing the mere inches of space that separate us.

“Will you tell me things about you now?” I whisper. “Things I don’t know…”

He shrugs. “There isn’t much to tell, really. It’s always just been me and my mom. My dad died when I was six, and that was pretty awful…” His throat bobs. “But it was a long time ago.”

“You don’t have any other family?”

He shakes his head. “Not really. None that we communicate with. I have one aunt in Brooklyn, my dad’s sister. The rest of his family lives in Spain. And my mom’s family disowned her because she didn’t fit in with them. She didn’t agree with a lot of their ideals…”

“You mean like religion?”

He nods. “She’s never had much interest in it, which I totally get. It’s kind of ridiculous… All these rules and regulations just for *faith*.” He scoffs, then peeks at me. “But I don’t need to tell you this. You were raised Catholic, it’s pretty much the same dumb bullshit.”

Don’t I know it... I nod. “Fucking stupid.”

“Totally,” he agrees. “*Fear the Almighty or He’ll strike you down*.” He huffs, shaking his head. “And the craziest thing is that all these religions

have spent centuries fighting over who *He* loves the most, when the whole time He's been historically indifferent to them all equally."

My eyes narrow, because he makes a really great point. *The kid's smarter than he lets on, that's for sure.*

"I just find it so infinitely idiotic… Killing each other when we're all worshipping the same asshole who doesn't care," he sighs. "But anyway. That's enough of my anti-theistic ranting."

I chuckle, scooting in closer. Because I like what he's saying.

"One of my mom's brothers left too," he goes on. "And they got a place together in Lebanon for a bit before Mom decided to come here. He still lives out there. We went to visit him once when I was twelve." He chuckles as if he's remembering something. "He's a cool guy. But yea, the community in Brooklyn was even more pissed off at my mom when she married a Spanish guy."

He laughs again, and it makes me smile. "Your mom's kind of a badass, huh?"

"She is." He grins. "Gives zero fucks about what anyone thinks."

"Reminds me of someone…" I smirk, and he bites his lip. "I'll still never understand how she ended up with my father… He's, like, the opposite. All he *does* is care what people think. It's exhausting, bordering on psychotic."

Avi shrugs. "I don't know…" His fingers brush over mine. "Maybe sometimes opposites can attract. Maybe someone has something that you don't… And they make you better."

I can't even help how I'm leaning into him, closing the gap. Resting on him and his deep words that mean so much to me right now.

That old resentment? The anger and the irritation… the hatred I'm not even sure was real to begin with… I think it's fully gone. And all I'm left with is a desire to get *closer*… to learn more and listen more.

Like maybe I should have been doing from the start.

"Avi…" My fingers lace with his, almost timidly. And then my leg swoops over his. "I need to ask you something…"

"Ask me," he whispers.

"Was it really an accident…?" My mouth eases closer to his lips. "When you touched my hand earlier?"

Raising my hand clasped in his, he drags it up to his chest. "It's never been an accident with you, Kyran." My eyes flutter shut, forehead dropping

to his. “Was it an accident for you? When you called me *baby*…?”

My head shakes. “It’s never an accident.”

A hum rumbles up from his chest, and I press my lips to his to catch it.

I have no idea what I’m doing anymore… I don’t understand this. Me and him… What’s real and what’s pretend.

All I know is that I’m kissing him because I *want* to, because it feels good. And I don’t give a fuck about money or recording… I don’t care that he’s my stepbrother, or that we’re different. This isn’t about the fans.

Because we have one very important thing in common that I never noticed until right now… We’re *both* trying desperately to figure out who we are.

Running in circles alone, we somehow wound up chasing each other.

Pushing myself on top of him, I’m coming undone in an instant, falling apart on his mouth, building sweet friction between our writhing bodies. And this time, *my* hands are ripping off his clothes, and my own. I’m driving this, after so many times when I’ve let it feel like he was making it happen. Right now, it’s all me.

I’m going to fuck him because I want to, not because I have to, or because I’m telling myself that I do. I want to feel us coming together, because it’s the only time when I’m sure of anything.

Avi yanks the comforter over us, and we move in synch, kissing wildly while he uses something like lotion to get his dick wet.

“We have to be really quiet,” I mumble on his lips, my cock leaking on his abs as I sit astride him. Grinding my ass back against his erection, slipping and sliding it in between. “I think my dad will be coming home soon…”

“So… not the time to use the cock ring, then?” He grins, and I rumble a salacious laugh, shaking my head. He holds my jaw in his hand, keeping my face in line with his while he aims his crown up to my hole. “We’ll use it when we get back to the dorm.”

I nod, biting on his lip to keep quiet as he slips inside me. It takes me a moment, but when I lift, I see stars behind my eyes, bearing my weight on my knees and building to an easy rhythm.

His bed creaks a little, so we keep it slow. But it’s fine, because it feels *incredible* this way… Hands all over, lips sucking, teeth nipping, tongues professing what our mouths have to keep quiet. We’re all breaths, soft

gasps, and hushed grunts, hidden away in secret, giving one another the pleasure that's been sustaining us all along.

And by the time my orgasm is ready to pull me over the edge, I can't fucking believe I ever even attempted to fool myself into thinking this was just about the money.

There isn't a camera in sight, and it's the best sex of my life.

Avi's cock swells in my ass, and mine throbs between our joined bodies, both of us erupting in mirrored bliss, making a sexy mess all over one another.

But it feels divine. *Heavenly…*

A miracle if there ever was one.

My damning he's turned into sweet salvation.

Christmakkah morning comes with Avi and I startling awake to voices and noise outside his bedroom door.

After the mind-blowing sex that was just for us, we spent hours talking until we both fell asleep. In his bed. *Together*.

With our parents just up the hall.

Yea, maybe not the best idea. But still, it was the best night of my life, and I'm scared to think about what that means.

Jumping out of bed naked, clothes in hand, I rush toward the bathroom with Avi hot on my trail.

"Fuck…" I grumble. "Do you think they heard us last night?? No, there's no way. They would've said something. Or not… because that's really awkward." I ramble as my mind runs a marathon of neuroses.

"If you think you're getting into that shower before me, you're higher than I am," Avi grunts, pushing me out of the way.

"Are you fucking serious??" I whisper-bark at him. "Which one of us still has cum lingering in his ass?"

I raise my hand, and he grins. "Please keep raising your hand to that question. It's my favorite thing you've ever done."

I roll my eyes, going for the knob in the shower. Turning the water on, I peer at Avi while he stands naked in front of the vanity, stretching and grabbing his toothbrush.

“I can see you checking me out.” He winks at me in the mirror.

“I’m not checking you out…” I grumble. “I’m just wondering how it’s possible that I actually shared a bed with you last night.”

“Why? Because I’m so awesome, you can’t believe how incredibly lucky you are?” He beams.

Scoffing, I step into the shower, yanking the curtain closed. “Shut up, Avi.”

“Just let me know if you want me to join you…” he sings.

“Yea, I’m sure that would work out beautifully,” I mutter sarcastically. “Your mom comes up here to look for us and we’re in the shower together. Merry Christmakkah to us all!”

He laughs, going about his business while I wash myself up, all the while swimming in memories from last night.

I’m having trouble processing it as a *real* thing that happened…

Not the sex, because I’m getting used to that for the perplexing ecstasy it is. But the part where we cuddled up together, naked, touching and talking for hours on end. The part where I fell asleep with my head on his chest and his fingers in my hair, our legs tangled, keeping us as close as possible without swallowing each other up.

We talked about everything under the sun last night… Everything except for one big thing that I have no intention of ever mentioning to him. But all the other stuff…

I learned that his favorite music is grunge and alternative rock from the nineties, because his mom used to play for him when he was little. I learned that his obsession with licorice begins and ends with the red, and that he thinks the black is more disgusting than rosemary, which he also hates.

I learned about all the crazy things he believes to be real, like Bigfoot, and the Mothman, various aliens and monsters and beings from other dimensions.

I learned that he’s never really had an actual relationship that’s lasted longer than a few weeks, and that he’s never been to a school dance. It bummed me out to hear this, because I’d completely forgotten until he mentioned it that he was conveniently absent from our high school prom. And I hadn’t even noticed at the time.

Regret is still rolling my stomach at the sound of his voice in my mind…

“I’m kind of a loser, Kyran… In case you didn’t notice,” he huffed, using a fake grin to disguise real feelings I hate myself for missing before. *“And losers don’t get to slow dance at prom.”*

This thing with us is complex and confusing and fucked up beyond belief, but the more I think about it, the more I’m sure that last night was the kind of night you have with someone you’re about to fall for… And I had it with my stepbrother; a *guy*.

None of this is supposed to be happening… And I’m scared to death of what it all means. But at what point do you stop fighting things that light you up inside like the Christmas tree in Rockefeller Center?

Avi’s been telling me all along to stop fighting what feels good. And the whole time, I brushed off his words, because he doesn’t know the real story. The real reason why this image I’ve created for myself is so important.

But at the same time, I’m finally beginning to recognize this for what it is… *Good*.

No matter how complicated it is, it feels *amazing*, the things we do together. Before last night, I thought it was just the sex that stirred up every desire that’s been hidden inside me, buried beneath layers of denial and self-preservation. But now, I know the physical part was just the beginning…

Somewhere along the lines, the hate fizzled out, and something new sprouted up in its place. *Affection… Fondness… Attachment?*

I don’t get it, but now, when I’m peeking at him from around the shower curtain, watching him gargle mouthwash and tie his messy hair back in a tiny half-bun, I don’t see my stepbrother who pisses me off to no end. I don’t even see my reluctant business partner I’ve been forced to interact with in order to stay in school.

I just see *Avi*.

The guy who’s seen parts of me no one else has. The guy who never stops smiling at me, no matter how mean I am to him.

The guy with snowflakes on his eyelashes, who brought me my coat last night.

That guy wouldn’t be doing all of that just for money… Would he?

“Are you about done?” he rumbles, and I flinch away to pretend like I wasn’t just staring at him.

“Uh…” I can’t even form words.

I’m too busy tangling up in a mess of emotional weeds.

“Alright, that’s it.” He whips the shower curtain back and climbs into the shower.

His big body is crowding me, and I back up against the wall while he grabs the body wash and begins lathering himself up.

If I was looking for a distraction from my state of confusion, here it is. Avi’s soapy muscles, suds slipping down their tanned slopes.

“If you don’t want me to bend you over right now, you’re gonna have to stop looking at me like that,” he murmurs.

Blinking at him while droplets of water tumble over his full lips, I stand still, shivering as blood pumps rapidly to my aching cock. Avi’s eyes fall to it, then back up to mine. And he lets out a ragged breath.

“Turn around,” he whispers, hoarse and commanding. And now my ass is literally clenching in need. “We’re gonna have to make this quick… and quiet.”

Nodding, I turn around and plant my hands on the wall. I don’t care about anything right now other than getting him back inside me. I’m officially addicted to this new distraction from the chaos, which feels *oh-so much better* than the denying myself I used to run with.

Avi moves up behind me, his dick immediately jamming me in the ass. I gasp and he hums, running his hands up my wet sides, sealing himself to my back and decorating my shoulders with soft kisses. I can feel his arm moving as he strokes his cock, then his fingers swirl around on my hole, making it slippery with something… Maybe conditioner? Who even knows… Who *cares*, I just need him inside me before I die.

“Are you open and ready for me, baby?” he whispers in my ear, tracing a line up my neck with his tongue.

My face slants to glare at him over my shoulder. “Are you calling me loose??”

He laughs with his lips on my shoulder. “No… I would never call you *loose*, Kyran. I’m just making sure you’re relaxed.” He stuffs a finger inside me, and I purr. “And it feels like you are.”

“Ffuck you,” I groan, leaning back against his chest while he fingers me slowly, my body craving him wider; *deeper* than a finger can accomplish.

“Mmm… I love it when you get hostile,” he croons. “Don’t worry, baby. You can be my sexy little slut and still have the tightest hole in the goddamn

universe.”

Whimpering, I push my ass back against him while he slides his finger out, nudging the head of his cock between my cheeks.

“Ready, gorgeous?” He grips my hip with his left hand, nipping my shoulder. “You’re about to get probed.” He chuckles, and I roll my eyes.

“Oh God… please don’t start talking about aliens again,” I huff, then whine as he jams that fat crown into me.

“Man… You’d be a Gray’s wet dream,” he yammers, teasing me with the round, plump head. “They like to see how much they can make you spray.”

“Avi, just shut up and fuck—” My hiss is cut off when he shoves his dick in. “*Meee*.”

“Shhh.” He presses a firm hand on my back, forcing me to bend at the waist. Palms flat on the wall, I brace myself while he drills up into me slowly, feeding me every inch of his cock. “Quiet, baby. Let me fuck the cum out of you real quick.”

“Unngghfuck, Avi…” I mumble random sounds and syllables, bending over while he builds a rhythm, pounding into me slow, but fierce. “Ahhh… *vee*, fuck my ass harder…”

Digging his fingers into my hips, he works his cock in and out, the friction of him within my body’s walls and the lashing of my prostate sending me sky-high in an instant. I’m trying my hardest to be quiet, because showers tend to magnify sounds. Just ask the *slap slap slap* of his skin against mine that seems to be rippling all around us.

“Look at that ass taking my cock…” he whispers, slinking his hands around to my front to play with my nipples. “The sight alone is gonna make me bust in you, baby.”

“Ffuuck… good,” I croak. “;Cause I’m… *ah*, I’m probably gonna… come soon.”

“Yea?” He sounds elated, melting his chest over my back as he mashes his hips into me, bruising my cheeks with brutal thrusts. “You nice and sensitive for me this morning, beautiful boy?”

I nod fast, eyes rolling back from the zaps of lightning he’s shooting through my loins. I *must* be super-sensitive, because every stroke of his cock is turning me out, my dick pulsing precum as it swings up and down from the force of him slamming into me. Reaching for it, I palm my balls,

squeezing them before jerking my cock to match his tempo. It feels sublime, and I'm winding up tighter and tighter.

Avi smacks my hand away, taking over to stroke me while he fucks me, his other hand gliding up to my throat. His hand curls around it tight and I whimper, because I'm not sure why… But I just *love* the feeling of him choking me while he's turning my ass out.

"You're being way too loud," he scolds.

I hadn't even noticed that I was. But then I'm also on a rocket ship to Mars, so everything sounds like a fiery blast off.

His fingers move away from my throat and the next thing I know, he's jamming his thumb into my mouth.

"Here. Suck on this," he hums.

Of course, I do.

Fuck, I don't know what it is about his dominant side that destroys me so damn good. Maybe it's because he's not like that in regular life… So it's like there's a side of him that only I get to see. His regular cockiness is turned up to the max when we're alone, and he becomes this demanding, growly, filthy-talking beast with a huge dick who orders me around. And something about it calls to my submissive side I never let out… For anyone but him.

Sucking feverishly on his thumb, I use it to thwart my groans and whines and sobs while his cock is driving me right up to the edge of the cliff like Thelma and Louise.

"Show me how you come for only me, superstar," he whispers in my ear.

"Mmm mm mmmm…"

There it is… It's right… here… I'm…

Avi pulls me upright, straightening my back flush against his chest while he beats my dick off and ruts up into me. And I burst, shooting streams of cum all over the shower wall while he milks out each aching contraction.

"That's it, my pretty little football slut," he whispers, and my eyes are rolling back in my skull. "Look at that big dick come…"

My entire body is tingling all over, chills of hot and cold rushing beneath my skin as my ass clenches tight on his cock. As soon as I'm finished coming, he shoves me back over, bending me all the way at the waist so that I'm almost touching my toes. Then his hands grip my ass

cheeks hard, spreading them open while he surges his cock in and out of me.

"Avi…" I whimper, struggling to keep my wobbly knees from giving out. "Avi, come in me… b-baby."

"God, I love hearing you call me that," he grunts.

My hand rushes up to my softening dick and I tease it, with my balls, the sensitivity causing me to shudder.

"I'm gonna feed your greedy hole every hot pulse." His voice cracks, his thrusts becoming frantic.

"Give it to me… *please*."

I can't believe I'm begging for cum… It's fucking baffling, but there's no way I can deny this need. Not right now…

Not with his dick swelling up in my ass.

"Squeeze on it," he snarls. "Suck it all… *out*. *Fuck*, baby, I'm gonna fill you…"

"Fill me."

"Take it."

"I'm taking it."

"Kyran…"

"*Avi*."

I'm being flooded. I can feel it, gushing inside me while he stuffs it deep with shallow thrusts. Gasping and panting and the quietest grunts we can control fill the air, covered by the running water as my stepbrother comes in my ass and I clench my muscles on him to grip him in me tight.

"God-fucking-damn, baby…" he sighs, hands rushing all over, cherishing my wet flesh with affection as he comes down from the high of his orgasm. "You *are* a fucking superstar."

A chuckle bubbles from my throat as he pulls me up and I straighten once more, his fingers playing with the curves in my chest and abs, lips dancing all over my shoulders.

"Superstar at getting fucked…" I rasp, resting my weight against him. "Who knew?"

"But only by me… right?" he whispers, a rare twinge of Avi vulnerability sneaking out with his words.

I gulp, and nod. "Only you."

And it's the truth. Because as up in the air as this whole thing has become, one thing I can say with full certainty is that I don't want to be

doing this with anyone else. It's confusing enough as it is… But for some reason, with Avi, it doesn't feel as scary as it should.

Maybe he's given me a little of his reliance… to share.

"Ky…" he rumbles into me, flicking my earlobe with his tongue. "Squeeze on it while I pull out. Hold it in… I wanna try something."

His tone has this needy fascination, a desperate wonder that has me doing exactly as he wishes. I clamp my ass while he tugs his cock out of me, slowly, prompting a long, satisfied hum from within my chest.

But then I feel him crouching down. And my cheeks burn as I peek at him over my shoulder, watching him open my ass and stuff his lips in between.

"Baby… Uhhfuck, *baby*, feed it to me," his choked voice stammers, like he's lost in the pure obscenity of what he's doing.

Licking my hole, sucking on it while I slowly, tentatively release and his cum seeps out… into his waiting mouth.

"Jesus fuck…" I groan, while he hungrily eats his cum out of my ass. "That's fucking…"

"Hot," he whimpers, kissing my hole over and over.

"*So* hot," I purr.

He stands up, wiping the back of his mouth and staring at me with hooded eyes. And I spin around, grabbing his jaw and kissing him hard, without a single fuck to give in the world.

This is so fucking dirty, so depraved… And we're not even doing it for the fans. We're doing it for *us*, because we *want* to. And just like everything with us, it seems to just happen.

Maybe the reason I've been fighting this so hard is because I knew it was inevitable… The chemistry of hate was never strong enough to overpower the hunger of *want*.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

AnyH0leWillDo: I'll be the squirrel, you be the tree, and I'll bust a nut in your hole.
Creampie_dreampie: idk bc Not_Your_Baby is looking pretty baby to me rn 😏

A knock at the door flings my heart up into my throat.

This… What is this??

I thought I was too high to feel such things…

Slipping the shirt I stole over my head, I rush to the door, crushing the grin on my lips. I'm mostly kidding with this ensemble, but I also really want to see the expression on his face.

Taking a deep breath to calm myself down, I whip open the door and grab him by the shirt, hauling him inside. His eyes are wide, a smile resting on his full lips that seems to be accompanying this cute little chuckle. *Very uncharacteristic for my stepbrother.*

But from *Kyran*… The Kyran I spent Christmakkah with, in my bed at our parents' house… I think it's a special gift for only me.

Like the Boston Red Sox cap he gave me, mumbling an adorable, "Because I couldn't stand looking at that Yankees hat for one more second."

Really, though… *Since when is he so cute??*

Kyran steps in front of me, grin widening as his head slants, arms folded over his chest while he looks me up and down. "So I didn't actually lose my jersey… You stole it."

I drag my bottom lip between my teeth, and his hazel eyes zone in on it happening. "I think you should be thanking me for locating it."

He chuckles, crowding into my space, his hand sliding up the material of his football jersey covering my chest. “You know I never washed this after my last game…” His smile brushes mine, and I hum.

“I like it. You smell hot,” I rasp, and he laughs again.

Clasping my hands in the silky strands of his honey-colored hair, I pull him closer, kissing him slow, playing with his tongue until I’m jittering like a fiend.

“You look so good in this,” he purrs into my mouth, clutching a fistful of his jersey while our bodies writhe together, lips working up ravenous suction. “Better than anyone else who’s ever worn it…”

“Even you?” I tease.

“You wish, dumbass.” He grins, backing me up against the door, both of our dicks straining between us.

Except that he’s wearing pants, and I only have my Calvins on… So it feels *really* fucking good when he drags all those inches along mine.

Spinning and pushing him against the wall with a grunt, I kiss him harder, working us both into a trance while my hand slides in between us to cover his erection.

“You want me to leave it on?” I ask, easing him backwards, toward the bedroom.

He nods frantically, and I can’t help the salacious smirk on my swollen lips.

We were supposed to stay at home for a week, but it became clear from being there for two seconds that Kyran didn’t want to do that. So the day after Christmas, I pitched the idea to him about making up some football excuse so we could come back to the dorms early. I would’ve liked to spend some more time with my mom, but I think getting Kyran out of there was a little more important.

So we came back to BC two days ago, and have spent pretty much every waking minute of that time with our hands, mouths, and dicks otherwise indisposed.

I told him it would make more sense for him to just stay here… While everyone else is away for Christmas break. Why not recreate that amazing night we had at home over and over again, for as long as we can?

But Kyran is still hesitant. I can’t say I expected him to just drop all of his straight-guy nervousness right away. I’m just glad that he keeps coming over here, willingly, no longer under the guise of recording ourselves for

the OnlyFans. Of course, we do still do that… Because it's what we're used to, and it's fun. But it doesn't feel like a *necessity* anymore, which is as amazing as it is unnerving.

If we're not doing this for the fans, then that means we're doing it… for each other. For a *relationship* of some kind. And I don't think Kyran is prepared to deal with that. Truth be told, I'm not sure I am either. Because I've never done anything like that before. Not with a guy… Not with *anyone*.

I'm a relationship virgin, and it has me in a constant state of panic that I'll do something to scare him off. *We all know he's more than skittish as it is.…*

"Avi…" He mumbles on my lips in between us mauling each other on the way to my bed. "I have a surprise for you…"

"Yea," I hum, pulling him on top of me as I crash down onto it. "I have a surprise for you, too."

"Okay, but mine actually doesn't involve sex." He stops me before I can rip his shirt over his head.

"Oh?" I breathe, chest jumping from how goddamn turned on I am.

He shakes his head, brows zipping together. "Why… does yours?" I nod, biting my lip.

"Oh…" He slides his fingers over my abs, still covered by his jersey. "Well, I guess we could do yours first then."

This time, I shake my head. "No, no. Now I want to hear about this non-sexual surprise you have for me."

His cheeks flush. "We have to go outside for it. I mean, we have to… leave the dorm."

I'm gaping at him like he's just sprouted two more heads, and they're both equally gorgeous and adorable. *He has a surprise for me that actually involves us… being out in the world?*

"Okay." I nod slowly, really attempting to contain my zeal. "Should I… get dressed?"

He shows me an almost ecstatic grin. "Yes." His eyes glide over me once more and he whispers, "But keep wearing the jersey. Please."

Fuck me sideways, I'm going to swoon to death.

Kyran crawls off the bed, offering me his hand while I get up, twirling like a top from how different this all seems. How much he's acting like a

hesitant hetero boyfriend. I could be imagining it… but the fact that he wants to take me out of the dorm is certainly a step in that direction.

"Are you going to tell me where we're going, or is that part of the surprise?" I ask while we leave the Thomas More Apartments, wandering outside into the chill.

"That's part of it." He grins at me from the side, walking up toward the main street, expecting me to follow him. Which I do.

He stops in front of a black SUV and spins to face me.

"Did you… buy me a car?" I blink, and he laughs.

"Uh, no." He rolls his eyes in amusement. "It's a rental. Part one of the surprise requires us to drive."

Grabbing me by the arm, he tugs me around the car, a Benz—a super fancy one. He opens the passenger door for me, gesturing for me to hop in, and I do, all the while wondering what on earth he's up to.

Did he really just open my door for me…?

Kyran gets into the driver's seat and buckles up, starting her with a quiet hum before he peeks at me. "You ready?"

I grin. "Always."

Shifting, he pulls us away, cruising the streets from the BC campus.

"Can I put some music on?" I ask while he drives, looking comfortable and sexy behind the wheel.

I must admit, I really like it. I'm not much of a driver myself, growing up in the city and all. I know how, and I enjoy doing it on occasion. But I think I might like being chauffeured by him way more.

Kyran plucks his phone out of the center console, unlocking it quick and handing it to me. "It's hooked up to the Bluetooth. I've got Spotify."

That gives me an idea…

Searching for the Spotify account I made, I select one of my playlists entitled *for the FANS*, and press play.

Kyran peeks at me, and I smirk. "You recognize this song?"

"Oh yes," he sighs. "You used to play it constantly when we lived together." I chuckle. "I probably know all the words at this point."

"Really?" I cock my head. "Prove it."

He laughs, shaking his head. But as soon as I start singing, he joins me. And the next thing I know, we're both belting out the words to one of my favorite Weezer songs, *"Say It Ain't So."* And yes, he does seem to recall all the words, because when we get to the part about *Dear Daddy, I write*

you, he's got the whole thing down. I'm dying laughing by the time the song ends, and he's wiping tears from his eyes.

"Ooh, this one's good too." I bounce in my seat as *"She"* by Green Day starts.

"You know, I feel like you're too young to like this music." He chuckles.

"Oh please," I scoff. "Nineties music is clutch. Plus, I told you—"

"It's what your mom used to play," he finishes my thought, glancing at me. "I know. I remember."

Pursing my lips to keep the vibrant smile down, I settle into my seat, humming along with the music. The next song is starting while I gaze out the window at the signs. We're leaving Boston Proper, I guess you'd call it, and heading away from the city altogether.

"How far are we going?" I ask, impatience lining my tone while I start fiddling with things on the dash.

"The word is *surprise*, Avi," he hums, giving me one of his scolding looks.

"I know, but like… how much longer?"

"Do you have ADHD or something?" he grumbles through an amused smirk.

"I don't know." I shrug. "Maybe. Probably. *Ooh!* What's this stuff??"

I turn, bending to check out some bags on the floor of the backseat. It looks like they're filled with snacks, but he smacks me on the side before I can get a good look.

"Just sit down and shut up," he barks, though he's still grinning. "Jesus, you're like a child."

"Sorry HGB," I snicker, nestling into my seat.

"What's that? What are you calling me??"

"It stands for Hot Grouchy Blonde." I grin, and he scowls. "It's what the fans used to call you when they were begging for us to collab." I chuckle.

"How endearing," he mutters, and I bite my lip.

"Hey, if the shoe fits…"

He shoots me a look, but he can't seem to stop smiling and it's really just driving me insane. He looks… *happy*. For pretty much the first time since I've known him. Without orgasms, or football… It's pretty astonishing.

“I saw that picture of us you posted to the Fans, by the way…” he says sternly.

I already know what he’s talking about. I snapped a picture of him last night, after I made him come three times and he was cuddled up on my chest, his sandy hair all tousled about, cheeks flushed, and his eyes closed. Of course his face was covered in the one I posted. He also wasn’t exactly *sleeping*, but he was in one of his post-orgasm dazes when he just won’t stop touching me.

It was a moment I couldn’t not capture. So I snapped a picture and shared it on the OnlyFans, with the caption, *I think he’s definitely my baby now.*

Chewing on the inside of my cheek, I peer at his face, hoping he’s not going to call me a mushy idiot for it. “Did you see what they were saying?”

“Yea,” he sighs, tapping his thumb on the steering wheel. “They kinda freaked out over it, huh?”

“Because they’re fans of *us*, Kyran,” I tell him sincerely. “Us together. It’s like watching a love story and rooting for the two main characters to end up together. Sure, they love to watch us fucking, but I think they also love us as a… couple.”

His smile finally falls away, and my gut starts to churn with unease.

I pushed too far. *See, this is what happens when you don’t know how to be in a relationship. You act like a freak and ruin everything by being so painfully uncool.*

Kyran’s eyes flit to mine. “But in those movies… it’s fake. Right? I mean, the actors aren’t *really* together…”

Rubbing my palms up and down on my jeans, I hum, “That’s true… Although, I guess sometimes they are. In real life.”

He nods, quietly staring at the road ahead, like he’s deep in thought.

It’s stiflingly quiet inside the car until he finally mumbles, “I don’t know how to do this, Avi…”

“Do what?” I ask, terrified of what he’s about to say, and hating every second of it.

“I don’t know how to… admit that I’m…” He stops to swallow and chew on his lower lip. “That I might like…”

My chest tightens when I realize that he’s not necessarily worried about liking *me* as a person… His concerns are with him liking the same sex.

“Guys?” I toss out the word he’s dancing around, and he glares at me. But it’s less angry and more… afraid.

I feel awful that he’s struggling with this so much more than I ever did. I mean, I haven’t officially come out as bisexual to anyone other than my friends, but still. I know telling my mom won’t be anywhere near as difficult as him telling his dad would be. Or his teammates.

“You don’t have to worry about it right now,” I tell him, letting him know with my tone that I’m being serious while also remaining firmly planted right here for him. “There’s no rush to figure things out. Just enjoy yourself, and it’ll happen… when it happens.”

He comes to a stop at a red light and turns to face me a little, severe appreciation and some mild astonishment shining in his eyes. “I have a question…”

“Ask me.”

“Why do you act like you don’t care about anything when it’s so obvious that you do?” He tilts his head. “Why do you… do all these drugs to tranquilize the real Avi? You don’t have to… He’s crazy smart, and sweet, and… kind of fucking awesome.”

My mouth hangs open for a moment while I just stare at him, feeling like he just ripped the mask clean off my face, and is gazing intently at the ugly mass of doubt underneath.

“It’s…” I murmur, my voice getting caught before I clear my throat. “It’s not always easy being me, Kyran. It’s not like it is for you… Nobody tells me how awesome I am, except my mom. But she’s just saying that because she has to.”

His forehead lines. “No, she isn’t. She’s saying it because it’s *true*. Avi, do you have any idea how much I wish I could be like you? Be fucking *different* and proud of that fact?? I think that’s why I always hated you so much… Because I’m jealous of how… *free* you are.”

I can’t fucking believe what I’m hearing. It’s so intense, there’s a buildup of pressure pushing behind my eyes like a dam about to burst.

Thank God for the light turning green and the person honking behind us for him to start driving again, because I really don’t think I could keep looking into his eyes after something like that without bursting into tears like a total baby.

“I’m sorry…” he mumbles. “If that was heavy, or if it felt like I was calling you out or something. I promise, I’m not. I just… I feel like I’m

finally seeing the real Avi. And I like him. A lot."

Blinking and swallowing over and over to hold myself together, I whisper, "Now you know how I feel…"

I sense that he's peeking at me, but I can't look over there again. *Not yet.* Not when I'm feeling something so potent for him. It's like this palpable emotion, pleading with me to wrap myself around him and never let go.

We drive the rest of the way without words. Just the crooning melodies of a playlist I made for *us*, full of songs that remind me of him, and lyrics that won't stop singing about him in my mind.

A little while later, he pulls off the highway, in a small town I've definitely never been to before. Another little grin graces his lips, and he becomes visibly excited once more, which means we must be close. Then he pulls us into an empty parking lot, with a giant white screen in it.

The sign reads *Mendon Twin Drive-In.*

My face is flinging left and right while I take in the setting. There's snow all over the ground, and not a car in sight. The place looks abandoned, which would make sense since I'm pretty sure this is a summer activity. There are also signs up everywhere that say *Closed*, so I'm not sure what he plans to do here.

But either way… It's romantic as fuck.

"You brought me to the drive-in?" I gasp, grinning and poking him in the stomach. "Because I told you I've never been?"

"Yup. It's honestly my favorite thing." He sighs, looking out the windows. "My parents used to bring Bridget and me here when we were little… in the summer. The place would be packed with cars. We'd put the seats down in the back and cuddle up with blankets and pillows."

I turn to check the backseat, and he chuckles.

"I didn't bring that stuff." He leans back against the seat, sloping his face my way. "I figured we could keep each other warm…" He bites his lip.

"I thought this was a non-sexual surprise?" I smirk.

He shrugs. "It's us. I don't think anything we do is non-sexual."

I have to laugh at that. "Good point. But… the place is closed?" I look around. "How are we going to watch a movie?"

He reaches into the backseat, returning with his laptop case. "Way ahead of you, babe." Unzipping it, he pulls out his laptop while I openly gawk at

the side of his face. “If you’re going to keep acting crazy every time I call you that, then I’ll be forced to stop doing it.”

I press my lips together. “Sorry. It’s just… *Babe*. I like babe.”

“I thought you might.” He slinks a side-look at me that’s part teasing, part totally sexy and boyfriend-y, and… fucking *mine*.

Great Odin’s raven, I have zero chill right now.

Kyran sets up his laptop on the dash, fiddling with it while he says, “Grab those bags back there. We’ve got movie snacks.”

Picking up the bags, I dig through them to find all my favorite things. Cans of Coke and root beer, gummy bears, Raisinets, Smartfood popcorn, pizza-flavored Pringles, and of course, Twizzlers. *Tons* of Twizzlers.

“Wait a minute…” I squint into the bag. “I don’t see a single PowerBar in here.” I peek at him. “What are you gonna eat?”

He laughs out loud, and my stomach tingles. “As far as I’m concerned, I’m on vacation. Plus, I can just go extra hard on the cardio later.” He winks at me.

“I’m very uncomfortable with how much I’m swooning right now,” I mumble, and he chuckles again. “Just saying…”

“All part of the plan… *baby*,” he hums, grabbing me by his jersey and pulling my lips to his.

We end up kissing until I’m practically climbing over the center console to get on top of him, but we both pull apart when we realize it’s not what we’re supposed to be doing right now.

I plop back into my seat with a hazy breath. “So, what are we watching?”

“Your choice.” He brushes his hair back with his fingers. “I’ve got all the best of Scorsese and Tarantino.”

“The kings,” I point out, and he nods.

“Naturally. But I also have my personal favorites… Rob Zombie’s *Halloween*, all the Texas Chainsaw Massacres, *The Strangers*, and *Silence of the Lambs*.”

“Oh right, I forgot. You’re a horror movie fanatic,” I smirk, and he grins. “Okay, well let’s go *Silence of the Lambs*, because it’s in my top five.”

His face whips in my direction. “It’s in my top five, too.”

“Really??” I gasp, thrilled by these occasional similarities we’re finding sprinkled within the sea of our vast differences.

“Yup.” He beams with pride, then counts out his top five on his fingers, “*Silence of the Lambs*, *The Strangers*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Reservoir Dogs*, and *The Departed*. In no particular order.”

“Wow. Solid top five.” I clap for him, and he bows.

“Now you go.”

“Okay…” I hold up my hand, lifting a finger for each. “*Goodfellas*, *Beetlejuice*, *Silence of the Lambs*.” I tilt my head, and he nods. “*Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*, and *Django Unchained*.”

“Hmm… So you’re a Leo fan, huh?”

“He excels in Tarantino movies,” I point out. “In my humble opinion.”

He nods, making a face like he’s impressed as he starts up the movie.

“Wait, so when I went as Vincent Vega for Halloween…” I murmur, watching his lips curl like he knows what I’m about to say. “You were totally fanboying inside??”

His face pivots, and he pulls one of his little scowls, though it’s infinitely less angry now. “Happy accident.”

I lean in, resting my elbows on the center console. “But there are no *accidents*.”

He laughs, a growly one, tingling my balls. “Mmm… maybe I liked your costume. Just a *little*.”

“Right.” I smirk. “Just a little.” He purses his lips to cover up a grin, and I sigh. “I can’t help but notice your list is lacking comedy of any kind.”

His forehead lines. “*Pulp Fiction* is kind of funny…”

A cackle bursts from my throat. “The fact that you think that proves you’re a psychopath.”

He chuckles, leaning back in his seat while the movie starts on the screen before us. “I just don’t like being subjected to… humor.”

I can’t help how I’m giggling in a horrified sort of way. “Oh my God, you *are* a fucking monster.”

“I’m just saying…” His words are wrapped in laughter. “I like finding things funny on my own terms. I don’t want to have it shoved down my throat. Which is why I hate stand-up comedy.”

“You would, you fucking ghoul.” I shake my head. “Have you ever even *seen* a good stand-up show? Bill Burr, Tom Papa…?” He shakes his head. “Okay, your homework assignment is to watch John Mullaney’s *Kid Gorgeous* show on Netflix. I went to see it live in New York, and I was almost peeing my pants.”

“Fine,” he sighs, reaching over to yank my hand onto his thigh. “If I promise to watch it, will you shut up?” I nod animatedly. “Good. Now, eat your snacks and be quiet.”

There’s no possible way I could evict the smile of a purely insane person that’s now living on my face. It’s a squatter, at this point. *Ain’t goin’ nowhere.*

I open us both a soda, then tear into a bag of Twizzlers for me, handing him some popcorn. And we eat one-handed while watching the movie, our other hands joined in the middle, fingers threaded and gently toying with one another.

This is by far the most romantic date I’ve ever been on. *Okay*, it’s the *only* real date I’ve ever been on, as an adult. I had a few stupid trips to the movies with girls in high school, but I’m telling you… panicking over taking their tiny hand in my sweaty one was nothing like the effortless way Kyran’s big hand fits in mine.

It just feels *right*, this whole thing. Being with him…

Even if it’s not, I don’t give a sparkling fuck soaring through the air. I never want this to end.

About halfway through the movie, I’m on a bit of a sugar high, inching in as close to him as I can get, which isn’t anywhere near close enough for me, with the stupid center console in the way. The sun has set, and the darkness surrounding the car is putting me in a bit of a mood.

“Can we go into the backseat…?” I purr in my most seductive tone, releasing his hand so I can walk my fingers up his thigh.

His eyes slide over to mine, glistening in the lack of light. “You think we’ll still be able to see the movie back there…?”

Shrugging, I crawl over to him, kissing his neck. “Not like we haven’t seen it a million times.”

I’m sucking his earlobe gently between my lips while he hums, breathing picking up significantly. “Okay, but we’re not even supposed to be here…” He sounds like he’s trying to fight against the lust we both know is going to win as my hand rubs up and down on his growing erection. “If we get caught, we’ll be fucked.”

“So *fucking* will happen either way,” I whisper. “And stop acting like being bad doesn’t totally turn you on… Oh, *stepbrother* of mine.”

He grumbles a sexy laugh, grasping my jaw and yanking my mouth to his. Sucking on my lips, he gives me his tongue, and I tease it with mine

before tugging that sweet, plump pillow of a lip between my teeth.

Forcing myself off him, I climb into the backseat—not very gracefully, I might add—crashing onto it while we both laugh. Kyran comes in after me, easing himself over my body where I'm lying, gaze hooded and watching him as he tugs his shirt over his head.

I can't help the way my greedy hands crawl up his abs and his chest, taking in the feel of soft skin draping hard slopes of muscle, every bit as satisfying as devouring them with my eyes. Kyran opens his pants, then undoes mine, our bodies instantly pressing together while we quench an erotic thirst with our lips.

There's an obvious lack of space in here that I'm very much enjoying. It's a pretty roomy backseat, but still, we're both big; over six feet and muscled, pawing at each other to build a congested heat that's already fogging up the windows.

He drags my pants down enough to get my dick out, pushing his jersey out of the way as he lowers his mouth to my cock. Licking it once slowly, his warm lips suck me in until my hips are chasing the good feelings.

Kyran fists the material of his jersey, slurping off my dick to breathe, "You're keeping this on. The whole time."

I nod, twisting my fingers in his hair. "Whatever you want, Number Nine." Shoving his mouth back down on my cock, my eyes roll back at the sensation and the way his tongue cradles me. "*Fuck*, I love getting head from the quarterback of the football team…"

He hums, grinding his erection on my thigh as he pops off. "How about sliding your big cock into the quarterback of the football team?"

"I love that too…" I bite my lip, my mind swirling around some thoughts from earlier.

Kyran sinks his mouth onto me once more, bobbing on my dick while he tugs my pants down farther, shoving his own beneath his ass.

"Baby, I was thinking…" I gulp, my heart pounding from the adrenaline of doing this here, the feeling of him sucking me silly. But also, with nerves for what I'm about to say. "About the surprise I was gonna give you…"

"The sexy surprise?" he rumbles, fully invested in kissing a line down my length, feathering my balls with his tongue.

"Yea, that one." I drag my fingertips across his shoulder blades. "I could give it to you now… If you want."

He peeks up at me, cheeks flushed his usual gorgeous pink. “There’s no way I’m saying no to that.” His hand slides up into my shirt, thumb flicking my nipple while he sucks on my nuts.

“Okay…” I shiver, parting my legs as best I can. “So… here it is…”

I’m stammering like an idiot, and I can’t help it. I’ve been wanting to try this for a while now, but it’s still making me all fidgety to confess.

“Kyran…” I rasp as he kisses various places on my dick and between my thighs.

“Avi…” He yanks my pants down even more, and I purr.

“I want you to fuck me.”

His entire body goes still as his eyes slide up to mine. And I just know I’m blushing harder than he is right now.

“You want *me* to fuck… *you*?” he asks, blinking wide, awestruck eyes.

My head tilts. “Yea. Nowhere in the rules does it say you always have to be the bottom.” I grab him by the jaw to haul his lips up to mine. And he comes willingly, his natural submissiveness giving me a nice, hard throb in the balls. “I wanna try some of that pleasure that makes you weep for me, baby.”

Kissing him slow and wet, I reach for his cock, pulling on it and stroking it with my fist. I can feel it swelling up in an instant, so it’s probably safe to assume he wants to try this, too. And I’m *dying* to know how it feels to be ridden raw the way he takes it from me.

I want him moving in between my legs… I want him rutting inside me, and I want to come on his cock. I want to fucking *bottom*, at least once, just to see what it’s like.

And the staggering but somehow easiest facet is that I only want it with *him*.

“Fuck…” he groans between my lips, fucking my fist slowly. “I wasn’t sure you’d want to…” His voice trails, and I hum. “But I’m glad you do. I wanna fuck you so bad, Avi.”

“God, I’m leaking already,” I pant. “Get that big dick inside me, please.”

“You’re gonna ruin my jersey, aren’t you?” He grins on my mouth, and I chuckle.

“You told me to keep it on…”

“Yea, because it’s hot as fuck.” He pulls away from my lips, gazing down with hooded eyes. “Even more now. I wanna shove my cock in you

while you're wearing my jersey, baby."

Lord have fucking mercy… I will never get over how sexy it sounds when he calls me that.

Kyran yanks my pants down to my calves, pushing my legs apart as wide as he can to wedge himself in between. I think we're both accepting that we can't get fully naked right now… in the backseat of a rental car while trespassing and all. But surprisingly, it's even hotter this way.

Both of us still clothed, for the most part, shoving our pants out of the way to fuck real quick before we get caught, because we *can't not*. There's no option not to do this here… I'm insatiable for him, and I now know with full certainty that he feels the same way.

He kneels over my hips, and I have to take a second to lean down and suck his cock, because it really just looks scrumptious. He fucks my mouth for a few minutes, gripping me by the hair, almost painfully. But the sting is turning me on more, and I'm gulping him back, swallowing on him like a fiend to get every little drop of precum he feeds me.

Draping himself over me, he kisses my lips, then down my neck, lifting the jersey so he can glide his tongue between every divot in my abs. Then he sucks on my crown, doing this thing with his tongue where he slides it along the underside of my shaft, brushing while just my head pushes into his mouth.

He keeps moving down, kissing my balls, then cupping them in his palm, holding them as he sneaks his tongue between the crack of my ass.

"Uhh… *Ky*…" My hips lift to get him better access. The tip of his tongue teases my rim, and my entire body quakes. "That feels so fucking good."

"I know, right?" He spreads my cheeks apart to eat me as best he can, though it's difficult at this angle, with the lack of space and my pants still on.

Regardless, the feeling is sweet, tickling bliss. *Another thing I've been desperate for him to do to me.*

"Baby, it might work better if I… flip onto my stomach," I rasp, curling at the waist to give him as much of my ass as possible. But he's kneeling over my legs, so it's hard to move.

"I know…" he mumbles, burying his face between my legs. "But I want to see your face."

Aww… That's sweet. Why is that so sweet?

“I promise I’ll… I’ll turn my face,” I breathe, sweating and burning up so hot my back is sticking to the leather. “I promise I’ll look at you.”

He nods and murmurs, “Okay,” sounding so sexy and eager for this, it has my heart crashing against my ribs.

Rolling me over, he kneels over the backs of my legs while he lifts the jersey enough to kiss a line down my spine, hands cupping my cheeks and opening me up wide.

“You have such a nice ass,” he marvels, massaging and kneading it with his fingers.

“So do you,” I hum, turning to gaze up at him from over my shoulder.

“And now I get to see my name on the jersey.” His lips curl excitedly before he sinks his mouth over my hole.

Ohh… My beautiful Number Nine.

It works much better this way, the full length of his tongue brushing up and down over my rim. He kisses a few times, then stuffs his tongue inside me, my fingers digging into anywhere I can reach.

“Kyran… *Fffuck*, that’s good. Fuck me with your tongue, baby.”

The way he slides it in and out of me feels wickedly wonderful. *I could just lie here all day every day, with my ass on a goddamn platter for him.*

But I know we don’t have that kind of time, and this tantalizing sensation of him probing me with his tongue has my body craving something bigger, and harder… Something thick and crazy long to stretch me full.

“L-lube…” I stammer through trembling lips. “In my p-pocket.”

“Two more minutes,” he whines. “Your ass is so fucking sweet, Avi.”

I feel drunk right now. “You eat me so good, beautiful…”

He finally tears himself away, breathing heavily and grasping my chin. “Will you let me kiss you?”

“Give me that tongue,” I growl, parting my lips for him to slide it inside.

He kisses me sloppy, high on the lush depravity, sucking my lips and my tongue in tandem. “You taste like candy, Twizzler boy.” He grins, and I chuckle. “My strawberry sweetness.”

“I’m fucking obsessed with you,” I whimper into his mouth. “You were totally right.”

“Good.” He reaches into my pocket, fishing out the bottle of lube. “Because I think I’m kind of obsessed with you too…”

God, my chest is on fire.

“Fuck me…” The words fly on ragged breaths echoing his own as he pours lube onto his fingers, coating his dick, then swiping them between my cheeks. “God, baby, fuck me right now. I’m gonna die if I don’t get to feel you soon…”

“Don’t die.” He kisses my lips, dragging the head of his cock over my hole. “I need you.”

“I need you,” I whisper with our mouths together while he stuffs a finger inside me, causing me to gasp.

“Avi, I fucking need you.” He repeats like a hushed mantra, fingering me slow, as deep as he can reach. “I need you so bad…”

“Mmm-me t-too… *Ky*…”

Our breathing is bouncing off the interior of the vehicle, windows fogged up so thick you can’t even see outside. Kyran plunges a second finger into my ass, stretching me and wetting me inside, and I’m so needy it barely even burns. I’m fucking *feral* for him.

His sex, yes, but for *him*, more than anything. I think I’d let him stuff his entire body inside me at this point, just to keep him; to feel him reigning over my insides.

Kyran tugs his fingers out, positioning the swollen head of his cock up to my hole. “I’m gonna go in slow, baby…” he breathes. “So you can feel every inch.”

I nod fast, and he begins to push, breaking through the barrier of my body.

His cock is thick as fuck, and so damn hard. But velvety soft and slick from the lubrication as it drives into me deeper and *deeper*, almost painfully slow. I’m surprised I can even hear Kyran over the sounds of me groaning, and my pulse popping off like fireworks in my head. But I can… and the noises he’s making are fucking ruining me for anyone else, ever.

“*Ahh*-vee,” he sighs my name like that, hoarse and drawn, mesmerized as he holds my ass open and feeds me inches. “So… tight… Baby, so warm and *sofuckingtight*.”

“Ummfffuck… *Ky*. Kyran, fuck me more. More more more.”

He does a little draw back before he’s all the way in that has us both moaning out nonsensical words, driving his big cock deep inside me until I’m stuffed so full, I can’t move.

“Holy fucking shit, this… feels… *amazing*.” He drapes himself over my back, holding up his body weight on the door so as not to crush me. “B-

babe… Is this what you feel when you fuck me?”

I nod, swallowing hard and biting my lip while I adjust to the feeling of something so *huge* lancing all the way up inside me. “Is this—*fuck*, is this what you feel when I fuck you??”

“Does it hurt?” He pets my hair, kissing down my neck. “We can stop if it hurts…”

“Don’t ever fucking stop.” I wiggle my hips against his, the sensation of friction on what must be my prostate lighting me up like the Fourth of fucking July. “*Ohh* God, yes. Yes, yes, yes…”

Kyran pushes his hips into mine, drawing back, then diving in again. It’s so intense, tears are seeping from my eyes. He lifts himself just a bit, working up a slow rhythm to finally fuck me the way I need him to, and I can’t help it. I’m fucking sobbing.

He grabs me by his jersey, stroking his cock in and out of my ass, gradually building to an illicit pump. Slow at first, but before I know it, he’s fucking the air out of my lungs and I’m whimpering only one word on repeat.

More.

“*Fuck me* more… Deeper. *Harder*. More cock, Kyran. More on that spot, Kyran. More more fucking *more*.”

“I wanna touch your dick,” he growls, reaching under me to jerk my cock while he rides my ass, driving me into the seat so rough I’m afraid I might break my ribs. But a punctured lung would be totally worth it because this is fucking *fantastic*.

Hard, rough sex, his hips smacking against mine, my dick pulsing a sticky mess all over the place. The car is straight up rocking around with his savage thrusts, and my back is arching up for *more*.

“You fuck so good…” I whimper, gripping his arm while rearranges my insides.

“You take dick so fucking good, baby.”

I can barely keep my eyes open, but I force them because I promised I would look at him. Our dazed gazes hold one another the way our bodies do, incessant need thumping and writhing between us while he fucks me right up to the edge.

“Are you mine?” he whispers shakily, muscles glistening with sweat and his hair hanging in his eyes making him look lightyears beyond fucking gorgeous.

“*Yes*,” I croak, clenching on him as my orgasm looms. “All yours.”

“Good. I’m all yours too.”

He eases down and takes my bottom lip between his, sucking and biting. And we both rush over, together.

“Fucking come for me, baby.” He slams his cock in me deep.

“Uhhfuck… *UhhmmKyran*, I’m *coming*!”

Trapped between my abs and the leather, my dick begins to throb, shooting all over everything. And Kyran doesn’t stop. He works it out of me with his big, beautiful cock, rippling in and out of my ass like crashing waves.

“That’s it… *Come* for me, sexy. Feel *every inch* of my dick in your perfect body while you come. *Fuck*, Avi, you’re… I’m…”

He groans and tightens before he spills in my ass, pouring deep into my body while he sputters for air.

“You feel so good coming in me, baby…” I mewl, my muscles contracting on him over and over as I float down from the high like a feather in the breeze. “Give me more. I want it all…”

“Avi, you’re sucking it out of me…” he whimpers, slapping his hand against the window to hold himself up.

Once his dick finally stops twinging in my ass, his hips come to a gradual halt, and he just breathes above me. Lowering himself a bit, he nuzzles his face in my hair, kissing my neck and my jaw and my lips.

I’m done. That’s it.

Game over.

I can’t even pretend anymore… I can’t hold it back, or rationalize it away. Not after this. Not after the way that felt.

I’m in deep, purgatory-level trouble right now…

Because I think I’m falling in—

Clearing my throat to shut my own mind up, I squirm as Kyran lifts himself off me and pulls out slowly.

“Shit, I’m sorry…” he mumbles, voice all raspy-sexy. “Am I crushing you?”

“No, I just…” My voice trails while he moves back, helping me off the seat. “My cum was like, gluing me to the leather.”

He laughs, and I crack a small, worried smile that hopefully doesn’t give away my state of fucked-ness.

“I’m screwed.” He pushes his hair away from his face, handing me a thing of wet wipes from inside the bag. “I’m gonna end up paying to detail the inside of this thing.”

“Probably a good idea.” I grin.

Kyran flops onto the seat next to me, cleaning himself up and redressing, while I do the same, only slower, because my ass is kind of sore and this is a lot messier than I anticipated. But I’m all flushed and squirmy because I *really* like it.

I like having him inside me this way…

Maybe that makes me a freak, but whatever. It’s the same thing I felt the first time I came inside him. Like I was branding my initials on him. And now I have his etched right on my heart.

Not just my body… I feel him in my fucking *soul*, and this is so bad.

Why did you think it was a good idea to let him fuck you, idiot?? Now you’re attached to him like some desperate fool, and it’s ridiculous.

Why do I *feel like this? Am I just physically incapable of having casual sex, or is he just so closed off it doesn’t affect him the same way??*

“Are you alright?” Kyran murmurs, and I put my obsessing on pause to peek at him. “You’re awfully quiet. Was I too rough or something…?”

He looks worried, and I’m cringing over how it’s beating inside my chest like a second heartbeat. The way he looks at me and the way he talks to me, and the fucking smell of him all over me, *God-fucking-damnit…*

I can’t fall in love with my stepbrother.

Forcing a tiny shake of my head, I grunt, “No. No, you were not too rough, trust me. I… That was the most amazing thing I’ve ever felt.”

His lips curl, and he flutters his lashes. “So does that mean we’re both bottoms now?”

I have to laugh, because he seems thrilled by this concept. “We can be any level of versatile you want, baby.”

His grin widens and he hums, while I shift at how fuzzy and hot it’s making me.

Oh crap… Has his smile always been that beautifully radiant? Are those hearts floating around his head??

Kyran doesn’t seem concerned with how weird I’m being. Because he’s too busy being way more affectionate than I’m used to. Easing himself back over to me, he wraps his arms around my waist, nestling up on my chest while he kisses my neck and breathes me in. Almost like he’s…

“Are you sniffing me?” I peer down at him.

“I like your smell, so what?” He trails his lips over the mound in my throat while it dips.

“Kyran, I—”

Nope. Stop it. Stop it right now.

I clear my throat again. “The movie ended like a million years ago. Are we… leaving? Or do you wanna put another one on?”

“I don’t want to go yet…” he says calmly.

I’m very fucking perplexed right now. This is like a one-eighty from the way he used to act after we’d fuck. *Is it just because he fucked me this time? Is that all it took??*

No, that doesn’t make sense either, because he was like this with me after we fucked on Christmas Eve. That was the night we stayed up talking until we couldn’t keep our eyes open any longer. And each night since then, he’s been lingering a little more and a little more afterward, like he’s slowly giving up on the idea that he needs to run away every time the sex-high wears off.

I mean, shit. This is a fucking *date*, I don’t care who you ask. And now he doesn’t want to go… And *I* definitely don’t want to go.

So maybe we shouldn’t… go. Ever. Maybe we should just stay like this and make *us* happen, because clearly, we both want it.

But he’s also afraid to admit that he’s bi, or gay, or whatever he feels like he might be leaning toward. *So how do I broach the subject without scaring him away?*

“Which one do you want?” he asks, and my brow furrows. “For the next movie…”

“Oh, right. Uh… You got *The Departed*?”

He grins. “Yes, of course. I told you, it’s in my top five.”

“Let’s do it, beautiful.”

He flashes me a quick, pleased look before crawling up toward the front of the car to grab his laptop. Watching him starting up the next movie, I crack open another can of soda, biting both ends of a Twizzler, and popping it inside like a straw.

Because it’s my thing. It’s what I did the last time I saw my father alive.

My dad loved Twizzlers. They were his jam, and I used to copy everything he did, so naturally, they became my jam, too. The day before he

died, he was doing some work around our apartment, drinking a can of Coke with a straw.

For those of you who don't know, they always used to give you straws when you'd buy a can of soda from the bodega in New York City, back in the day, before everyone recognized how bad straws are for the environment. *I guess maybe it was so you didn't have to put your lips on the dirty can, because who knew where it had been?*

Either way, it was a thing. But when my dad put his drink down for a second, I snuck over and pulled the straw out, replacing it with a Twizzler. My dad picked up his drink, stared at the Twizzler, then looked at me while I pretended to play with my toys, trying desperately not to giggle.

He plucked the Twizzler out of the can, took a bite out of each end and stuffed it back in, sucking up a sip of his drink through it.

"Ah… That's good stuff." He winked at me, and we both started laughing hysterically.

Ever since then, I always make a Twizzler straw for my sodas, because it reminds me of him, and that perfect day when he was around. He never was again after that…

Kyran crashes back into the seat, balancing the laptop on the center console, so we can stay in the backseat. But this time, when he leans up against my side, I drape my legs over his lap, cuddling up to him even closer.

Because for some reason, right now, I just need it.

We watch the movie in silence for a bit, though I'm surprised he can't hear how loudly the mechanics of my mind are clanking and banging, like an old crankshaft that's cranking way too fast.

There's just so much going on in my head; so much confusion and contemplation…

So much sudden desire to figure out where we stand.

"Hey…" I mumble when it gets to be *too* much.

"Mm?" he grunts sleepily with his lips in my hair.

"So… tomorrow's New Year's Eve…"

Smooth, Avi. Tell him what holiday tomorrow is, like he's an alien who just landed here and has no idea what December 31st means.

Kyran chuckles. "Does that happen every year?" His tone is teasingly sarcastic, but the smile I can hear in it turns me to a big ball of mush in his lap.

“Ha ha.” I purse my lips, peeking up at him. “Do you have any plans?”

He blinks at me for a second before answering. “Yea, um… Guty’s throwing a party at our dorm…”

My stomach twists into a painful knot. I swallow away the despondence and nod, breaking our eye contact. “Right. That makes sense…”

“Avi…” He hums my name. I don’t want to hear the pity in it, but it’s definitely there. “I would have invited you, but—”

“But I don’t belong there,” I mutter. “I get it. No worries.”

“No, that’s not it.” He shifts, moving so that he can look at me. But I’m still finding it difficult to meet his eyes right now. “I just didn’t want to… subject you to that whole… thing.”

“You mean a party with your friends who all think I’m a loser you hate being around?”

He shakes his head. “It’s not like that. I promise…”

I roll my eyes. “Then what is it like?”

He doesn’t speak. He just stares at me like he wants so badly to say something, but he can’t figure out how to make his mouth work.

Finally, he asks, “Do you have plans?”

I clear my throat. “Frankie’s having a party…” He nods, running his fingers over mine. I wish I could be as unaffected as he is, to spare myself from the inevitable heartache. But unlike him, I can’t stop my lips from whispering, “You should come over after.”

His fingers slowly thread with mine. “What if I came over before midnight…?”

My eyes spring to his, eyebrow arching. “Wouldn’t that look sort of… suspicious? Leaving a New Year’s party at your own dorm before midnight…”

He shrugs, playing with my fingers. “But what if the person I want to kiss at midnight is somewhere else…?”

Staring into his eyes, I’m lost for a moment in the blurred spots of mossy green that blend into the amber. They’re like a palette of paint I could dab a brush into, and make a special color just for him.

My chin bobs in a captivated nod. “Then I think you should leave the party… and go find that person.”

He smiles, leaning in closer to tease my lips with his. “So then it’s a date.”

“’Kay…” I whisper, forcing my voice to sound even.

But inside me, there's an earthquake happening. Ground shaking, rocking my foundation with all this stuff I'm afraid to process.

This stuff I can't ignore anymore.

Fuck the money… This isn't about the fans.

Backwardz_Cap is officially smitten… and fucking *terrified* of what that means.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Andy_Amo: Backwardz_Cap + Not_Your_Baby I wanna be saved so bad I almost prayed, can you boys be my new religion?
Slave4U69: Hey @Backwardz_Cap I got a Twizzler 4 U!
theSenator: Watching you two makes the difficult days a little more manageable<3

Avi

Extricating myself from Frankie's New Year's Eve party proved more difficult than I'd expected.

It was a very fun party, as they tend to be, and all of our friends were there. I knew it wouldn't be easy to slip out before the countdown to midnight, which is why I'd planned to make an undetected exit.

I would cause a distraction, and while everyone was focused on that, I'd slink out the door and rush back to my dorm to meet Kyran so we could kiss at midnight.

Because really, that's what this whole thing is about, right? That's why he wanted to come over before midnight… So we could do what we wouldn't be able to do in front of people at either of our respective parties.

I'm starting to wonder if it would even be so bad. I've certainly never given a shit what people think about me… *So what if they see me kissing my stepbrother?? Is it really that big of a deal?*

What if we have feelings for each other? Are we expected to just push them away and forget about them because society might find it a little strange?

The thing is that I would be willing to take that kind of heat from people for Kyran. At this juncture in our bizarre, befuddling little relationship, I'm coming to terms with the idea of disappointing and weirding people out for

him, because I care more about the way it feels to be with him than a million scoffs and eyerolls.

But I don't think Kyran is in the same spot, and that's been chomping away at pieces of my heart for the past twenty-four hours like some sadistic flesh-eating bacteria.

Kyran is confused about his sexuality. Add to that the fact that he's in the spotlight, being the quarterback of a football team poised to bring home a major championship this year, who will no doubt be scouted by the NFL next season, I'm not sure coming out as a guy who's having a relationship with his stepbrother is something he's jumping at the chance to do anytime soon.

It kind of sucks, but this is the predicament we find ourselves in. So these little moments, like sneaking away to kiss at midnight, are becoming more and more important.

A half-hour ago, I challenged Micah to do a shot out of Frankie's bellybutton, which I thought would serve as the perfect distraction to rile everyone up, keeping all attention on the two of them for long enough for me to slip out.

And it was actually working. Until Zeb spotted me, that loud-mouthed lush, and hollered, "Hey, Avi, where you goin'?!"

I paused with my hand on the doorknob, eyes squeezing shut as all the excitement deflated from my body. *So close.*

He and Bea staggered over to me, while across the room, Frankie was sitting up, shooting me a very suspicious look.

"I, uh… just need some fresh air," I lied, pretending to be woozy and drunk, when in reality, the only real high I was feeling was more like a *withdrawal* for a certain set of lips. "I might throw up."

"Oh, no!" Bea squealed in distress, grabbing me by the arm and tugging me toward the bathroom. "Come with me. I'll get you some water and rub your back."

"No… No, I'm *fine*." I tried to yank myself away from her. "I just need to go—"

"What's wrong with him??" Micah asked, rushing over with Frankie hot on his trail.

"Fuck me…" I muttered under my breath, rubbing my eyes.

"He feels sick," Bea hiccupped, brushing her fingers through my hair.

"Don't puke on my shoes!" Zeb cried, launching himself away from me.

“Is that right?” Frankie crossed her arms over her chest, narrowing her gaze at me. “Feeling *sick*, are you, Aviel?”

It was clear she wasn’t buying my little ruse, but I barely even cared anymore. It was eleven-fifteen and I still needed to get all the way back to campus if I was going to make it to Kyran by midnight. For all I knew, he could already be there, waiting outside for me and thinking I ditched him.

Fuck this. I knew I should have given him my key.

“You guys, it’s okay. Really.” I finally yanked myself away from Bea’s grip, stumbling back to the door. “I just need some air. I’ll be right… back.”

Tugging my phone out of my pocket while I whipped open the door, I found a text from five minutes earlier.

Kyran: I’m here… Are you back yet?

“Fuck,” I whispered, diving out into the hall and rushing down the steps.

Me: I got held up… I’m so sorry. I’m on my way now, just sit tight

I was practically running to the T, but it didn’t even matter because I sat there waiting for it for *twenty* fucking *minutes*. New Year’s Eve had everything on a stupid delay, and I felt like an idiot for not getting out of there sooner. There were no Ubers, no Lyfts. Nothing.

I was stuck waiting on the goddamn train to get me back to him.

It eventually showed up, and now I’m on it, frantically bouncing my knee, watching the minutes disappear before my eyes.

At my stop, I leap off the thing and take off running again, across the goddamn campus. By the time I get to my building, it’s fucking *eleven fifty-eight*, and I can’t even wait for the stupid slow-ass elevator. I jog up four flights of stairs to my floor, rushing up the hall to find Kyran sitting on the floor in front of my door.

“I’m so… sorry…” I gasp, out of breath with blood rushing in my ears. Dropping to my knees in front of him, I struggle to suck air into my lungs before I pass out. “Wouldn’t… let me leave. Train… no Ubers… fucking ran… Jesus Christ…”

I’m seeing spots.

Kyran’s lips slope into an amused grin. His hands reach out and he drapes them over my chest. “Breathe, Avi.” I pull in a deep one, and he chuckles. “It’s okay. You made it.”

“Barely…” I huff.

People begin shouting from somewhere up the hall.

They’re counting down.

Kyran bites his lip, fingers sliding up my neck. I know I should probably bring him inside… I don’t know if we can do this out here, in the open. *Someone might see.…*

But the chanting out numbers gets to five, then four, then three…

“Two,” he whispers, like he doesn’t give a single fuck about who could see us.

He just wants to kiss me.

And with my heart racing like I just did to get to him, that’s all I want in the world as I hum, “One.”

Crashing my lips onto his, I kiss him with my muscles trembling and my chest burning from so much more than just the exertion.

I did make it. I made it to us.…

“Happy New Year, baby,” he murmurs into my mouth, holding on to my neck to keep me close as my fingers stroke through his silky soft hair.

“Happy New Year.”

I can’t stop kissing him. It just feels too good.

Being with him right now… knowing that he showed up because this is what *he* wanted too… it’s everything.

“Are you gonna bring me inside or what?” He grins on my lips, and I grin back, nodding.

“Come on, beautiful.” I take his hand while we both stand up. “You’re mine tonight.”

“Baby… Can I take it off? *Please*…”

“Not yet,” I growl, my fingers digging into his hips.

“Please, Avi…” he whimpers again, running his hand along his swollen cock. “I need to come so bad it hurts…”

“I know, baby,” I hum, chewing my lip at the sight of his dick bobbing on my abs, all engorged, pink, thick and fucking stunning. The cock ring is really holding him back, and it’s incredible to witness. “But you heard the rules. Not until I come again.”

He whines, grinding his hips against me, riding my cock in gradual, quivering motions with his hands on my knees to brace himself. We've already been fucking for over an hour, and he hasn't come yet. I can only imagine the salacious burn he's feeling from the torture of this edging.

We started with him bent over on all fours, my cock stretching and filling his tight ass until I came, leaving that sweet hole overflowing. Then we repositioned so that I could lie back and let him ride me, the perfect angle for me to watch the gift from our fans work its magic.

And we've already spent an exorbitant amount of time testing out our other gifts. Last night—*slash this morning*—we fucked till sunup, playing with vibrating plugs, and these little suction cup things you stick on your nipples. We made sure to record videos of us using them for the people who sent them, which was fun, because filming is what we do. It's what's made us into this… whatever we are now.

But *off-camera* is where the real sorcery has been happening. The connection we've been building, that seems to grow stronger and more powerful with every illustrious second we mutually feed into it.

This is becoming so much more than just sex for the fans.

It's *us*. Not **Backwardz_Cap** and **Not_Your_Baby**… *Kyran* and *Avi*. Falling into each other, over and over again, because we *want* to.

Apparently, our bodies know no bounds where one another is concerned… Because I'm literal seconds from spilling inside him again. Seventh orgasm in the last eighteen hours, between sucking, fucking, and the one time he slid his cock inside my ass, wrapped my legs around his waist, and jammed at my prostate like he was trying to win a prize.

Of course, we were both winners in that scenario. And yes, the prize was more cum.

Which gives me an idea.

Lifting him off my dick, I move my hips, spreading my legs while he kneels in between, slumping against my leg with a tired sigh.

"Why'd you stop…?" He pouts, and it's as sexy as it is adorable.

"Put your cock in me." I breathe out the words in a rush, grabbing the lube and stroking some quickly onto his dick, magnified in its state of tumescence. The thing is fucking *huge* right now, and rock solid, which has me quivering below the waist.

Kyran bites his lip, scooting in closer while I aim his cock between my ass. He pushes in, and we both groan out loud.

“Fuck me, baby…” I hiss, but he’s already doing it, pumping into me with his palms on my chest. “Harder… faster… *deeper*, love. Fuck the cum out of me so you can get your orgasm.”

His hair is hanging in his eyes, both of us sweat-slicked, panting and grunting like fucking animals while he rides me out.

“Ummff… *Avi*… I might…” he croaks, running his hand down to fist my cock. “I don’t think I can hold it.”

“You can do it, baby.” My voice comes out all shaky from his vigorous thrusts. “I believe in you.”

“You’re the worst,” he mewls, dropping his face to suck on my nipples, jerking my dick and destroying me with the delicious burn of wet friction inside my body.

“You love it.” My head is fogging, muscles tensing, the orgasm bubbling up to a slow boil in my loins. “Fffuck, your big dick is gonna make me come…” Slapping my hands against his abs, I stop him and rasp, “Get back on my cock so I can come in you.”

He doesn’t hesitate or argue. Pulling himself out, he climbs back over my hips, seating himself fully on my pelvis, with every inch of me buried inside him. And the descent of his warm, tight channel sliding down my length is the final nail in the coffin.

I grab his hips hard, holding him in place while I shoot pulse after pulse inside him, whimpering hoarse sobs of, “Holy *fuck*… oh my *God*, I’m coming so hard in you… *Again*.”

“Avi…” he moans, flicking my nipples with his thumbs as he squirms on my cock, head tipped back, chest flying through wild breaths that match my own. “Your cum is so hot inside me…”

“Fuck yea, baby… work it out,” I mumble, forcing my eyes open to watch him. Then I peel the cock ring off his dick and his chin drops to aim a heady gaze at me. “Now come in me.”

“Thank God…” he whispers, sliding off my cock with my cum spilling everywhere. Moving back in between my legs, he holds my thighs open. “I wanna come all over you, baby… In your mouth and on your cock.” He shoves his dick inside me with a punishing thrust that has me crying at the overwhelming sensation. “But pouring deep in your ass wins.”

“Uhhfffuck.” Nonsense flows from my lips. I’m hypersensitive right now and feeling every single twinge of his thick cock as it moves in me. “K-Kyran…”

“Motherfucking *fuck*, I’m coming!” He gasps, crumbling and collapsing with his abs sealing to mine, trapping my sensitive, softening cock between us. “So hard… so, so *hard*, my dick is exploding.” He pushes and pulls steadily to milk out every aching throb I can *feel* flooding me.

It’s fucking *incredible*. More than incredible…

I think I’m dead.

“Ow… ow ow… ohhh boy…” Kyran whimpers, writhing us together and biting my throat. “Baby… I just came so hard in you it hurts…”

As I trickle back down to earth from the heavens, I find myself laughing. More like *giggling*. Seriously, I sound like a cartoon character, but I can’t even help it.

That was the most intense thing I’ve ever felt. And now I’m *laughing*.

Kyran starts chuckling with me, and the next thing I know, we’re both snorting, our bodies wiggling together with voracious bouts of breathy laughter.

“Oh my God.” He croaks out his giggles, wiping his eyes as he lifts himself up and pulls out of me slowly. “We made such a mess!”

“And you sound like you lost your voice.” I chuckle, then frown. “Okay, so do I.”

“Do you have neighbors on the other side of that wall??” He grins lazily, nodding behind us while his fingers trace the lines of my chest. “They might think we’re killing each other in here…”

“If that’s murder, then call me Jeffrey Dahmer, gorgeous.” I wink at him, and he laughs. I tap him on the ass. “Okay. Up. As much as I want to hold on to you forever, there’s cum literally everywhere. Let’s go take a shower.”

Pressing his lips together to cover a crazed smile, he cocks his head. “Together?”

I sit up, putting us nose to nose. “You wanna?”

“I’m *dying* to.” He grins, kissing me softly.

It’s so slow, and warm, and chock full of passion, I’m melting all over the bed.

So all those times he was showering in there alone… I could have been joining him? Because he’s dying *to…*

It feels like my heart has escaped my ribcage and is flying all around the room like a free bird to Lynyrd Skynyrd’s *“Free Bird.”*

Kyran peels off of me and stands up on wobbly legs. I do the same myself, and we walk together to the bathroom, casually peeking at each other and chewing on our lips to keep the psychotic grins from getting out.

"You're walking like you just got turned out," I tease, and he shoves me playfully.

"So are you," he growls while I shove him back. "You're pretty much my sperm bank at this point."

I gasp, grabbing his arm while he play-fights me off. "You're one to talk! That sweet ass has been ripping shots of my cum like tequila on Cinco de *Mayo*."

He tosses his head back in a booming laugh, racing me into the bathroom. Reaching inside, he turns on the water, and I give his ass a little smack. His face whips in my direction, cheeks flushed as he forces a scowl.

"You like that, baby?" I crowd him, and he hums.

"Don't tell the fans. They'll start sending us whips and paddles."

I laugh, feeling the water to make sure it's warm enough. Then I hop in, taking his hand in mine and bringing him in behind me. The shower isn't big—smaller than the one at home—so we pretty much have to stand with our bodies pressed together in order to both be under the water at the same time.

But you won't find me complaining. *I might never shower alone again.*

Squirting out some of my body wash into my hands, I lather up and run them over his muscles, *loving* the feel of him beneath my fingers. He watches me while I wash him, blinking droplets of water from his lashes that tumble down his puffy lips.

It's an image that will be seared in my mind for a very, *very* long time.

I savor the act of caressing soap onto every inch of him, taking my time like I didn't get to when we last showered together; touching his shoulders and arms, down his perfectly sculpted chest and abs. His big, beautiful dick gets much more attention from my fingers, before I move on to his legs and feet. Then I spin him and do his back, unable to keep from purring while I clean his ass.

His head drops back to rest on my shoulder, panting breaths echoing inside the small enclosure. When the soap rinses off, I just have to kiss his neck and his shoulders, running my fingers through his wet hair.

"You feel… so good," he breathes. "I've never been touched the way you touch me, Avi."

“I’ve never touched anyone the way I touch you…” I confess to him in a whisper, awed by how it feels to have my hands on him in a way that isn’t building to sex.

He turns slowly, taking the bottle. “My turn?”

I nod timidly, watching him as he does what he wants with me, washing my body with cherishing fingers, cleaning every aching muscle, every burn of chafed skin. I can’t stop staring at the way he’s examining me, wondrous gaze traveling the same route as his hands.

“This is… too good, Kyran.” My eyes fall shut when he presses his wet chest to mine, fingers running up my sides. *Too good to be true.…*

“Is there such a thing as *too* good?” he breathes.

Yes.… I think there is such a thing as *too good.*

Because no matter how high your soul soars, the fear of heartache always waits for you back down on the ground.

“I don’t know…” I grasp his jaw and bring his mouth quickly to mine, kissing him impatiently while I can, because I’m so damn *scared* this heat will run cold. “This is different, baby,” I hum in between frantic kisses. “Tell me it’s different for you too…”

He nods fast while our lips chase the high. “It’s different. It *is*.”

“What does it mean?” I hate the desperation in my tone.

I don’t want to be the one freaking out over this, but I am. I’m teetering, not knowing where he stands. Not knowing if this will last… Not knowing fucking *anything* other than how I feel about him, which is so spectacularly inconvenient it makes me shiver down to my bones even while standing under hot water.

“I don’t… I don’t know.” His voice shakes a little, and it kills me, because I don’t want him to be afraid.

We can’t *both* be afraid… it’ll never work. I want him to know for both of us, but I just don’t think he does.

It sucks.

“I wish I had answers, Avi, but I’m completely fucked up here…” he whispers.

“Do you want to stay?” I ask quietly.

He nods.

And the looming question fights its way up my throat. “Would you still want to… if someone knew you were here?”

Kyran seals himself to me, hands gripping my back as his forehead drops to mine. “I… I think so.”

My chest opens up like a bloom for him.

I think so…

Okay. I can work with I think so.

Kissing him for many more minutes, I eventually turn off the water and hop out, grabbing us both towels. I’m not going to press this any more right now, because I don’t want to stress him out.

He *wants* to stay. That’s a gift I’ll gladly accept.

We both dry off side by side, my eyes falling to my toothbrush. I remember him using it this morning, and a grin tugs at my lips. Peeking at Kyran, I find him staring at himself in the mirror, blinking at his reflection. The blankness in his eyes kills my smile quickly, and I just watch him for a moment.

This isn’t the first time I’ve seen him do this… Stare at himself in the mirror; gawk at his own body, his limbs, as if he’s never seen them before. It’s like he’s an alien wearing human skin… *An Edgar suit, if you will.*

It’s strange, and I really don’t know what to make of it. But after a few minutes of silence, he’s starting to freak me out a little.

“Ky…” I rumble, a dash of worry in my tone.

He blinks hard, then turns his face in my direction, all traces of that vacant stare having vanished. “Yea?”

“Are you… alright?” I ask softly, keeping my expression casual, so as not to let him on to my concern for his sudden spaciness.

He puffs out an exhale, then grins, though it doesn’t quite reach his eyes. “Fine. Why?”

“No reason…” I shake my head. “You wanna wear some of my clothes?”

“’Kay,” he sighs, his smile becoming a little less wooden.

Forcing myself not to dwell on it, I bring him back into the bedroom, rustling him up a pair of boxer briefs from inside my dresser. He steps into them, then saunters over to the bed, stripping the dirty sheets off. I can’t help but just stare at him while he does it.

He seems like he’s fully comfortable being here, but then who would really know? Kyran has always been a bit of a closed book, so it’s hard to tell what’s going on in his head at any given moment. I’d like to think I’ve

gotten to know him more over the last few weeks, but even so, he's not usually one to voice his emotions.

He keeps them bottled up inside, which is never a good thing when you're developing strong feelings for the bottler.

What are you hiding inside that pretty head of yours, baby?

Will it have you running from me again?

"You didn't have to make my bed for me." I fold my arms over my chest while he secures the clean sheets on my mattress.

"Well, you're kind of a slob." He shoots me a smirk. "I just wanted to make sure it got done right."

"Excuse you," I huff. "I am very clean."

"Right…" He chuckles. "You're about as clean as The Dude."

My laughter brings a sweet curve to his lips. Spinning, he traipses out of the room, and I have no choice but to follow him.

"Are you going to put on actual clothes?" I grin, biting my lip at the sight of his perfect peach of a booty in my black Calvins and nothing else.

"Are you complaining?" He pins me with a sly look before plopping onto the couch, grabbing the TV remote.

"That doesn't sound like something I would do." I sit down next to him while he chuckles.

We're both on one cushion because Robin is currently snoozing on the other side, taking up a majority of the couch. Kyran glances at her and scoffs, shaking his head, though he's smiling pleasantly while he searches for something for us to watch. He stops on one of the ESPN channels I didn't even know I had.

"I'm starving." His face slopes. "Will you order us some food?"

"Happy to."

I rush off to get my phone. And when I return to the room, I find him petting Robin's furry little head while she sleeps.

I'm swooning so hard, I'm like the heart-eyed emoji personified.

"What would you like to eat, gorgeous thing?" I kneel next to him on the couch while swiping through DoorDash. "Burgers, tacos… Ooh my *God*, this place makes the best fried chicken…"

"Avi, can we *please* eat something healthy?" he whines. "I have a massively important game next week. I don't want to be weighed down by all the junk food I consume when I'm with you."

“Weighed down??” I huff a baffled chuckle. “Your body is fucking insane, Kyran. You’re probably like, what… seven percent body fat?” He frowns at me, and I blink. “I’m sorry… Is that too much?”

“For *me*, yes,” he grunts. “I need to be in prime shape for this game. No fucking around.”

“Okay, well, we did just spend eighteen hours burning tons of calories, so I think you’ll be fine.” I smirk, and he returns the look with one of faux amusement.

“Just no fast food or excessive trans fats, please.” He curls himself around me, dropping kisses all over my neck. “For me?”

“Fine,” I grumble. “You see what I do for you?? What do *you* want to eat, babe?”

“Mmm… Sushi?”

I make a face, but I concede… because they do have those delicious fried pork dumplings. *I could just order, like, fifty of those.*

“Sushi it is, for my chiseled man and all eight of his friends.” I poke each one of his abs, and he growls, slapping my hand away.

“You joke, but sushi actually has a lot of starch,” he points out, and I just stare blankly at him. “From the rice…”

“Ah, *the rice*,” I tease, and he chuckles, play smacking me on the jaw.

Then I smack him back. And this goes on for minutes before I finally call a truce so I can order his damn sushi.

“Can we not watch this?” I complain some more, propped with my back against the arm of the couch while he lies between my legs, playing with my hands. “It’s boring. I’m sure MTV is running episodes of *Catfish* on a loop…”

When he doesn’t answer me, I peer down to where he’s gazing at my palm, running his fingertip along the center.

“I have this line too,” he whispers. “Except mine curves around here… Like the way Comm Ave runs up over campus.”

I give him a puzzled look, but he doesn’t notice it. Because he’s too busy studying the lines on my palm.

“Do you read palms or something?” I ask, bemused. “Because that would be very uncharacteristic of you.”

His eyes flit to mine, and he tilts his head as if he’s considering whether or not to tell me something. He smiles shyly, scooting up farther between my legs.

“Promise not to make fun of me?” His lashes flutter, and he bites his lip.

I’m barely breathing right now. “I promise.”

Lifting his hand, he turns his palm to face me. “Sometimes I do this thing where I imagine the lines on my palm are streets I know. See? Like this one can be 93, or the Pike.” He drags his fingertip up a line, then points to another. “This one is Hyland. See here, how it splits off like College Ave over by Davis Square? And you can follow it into Cambridge…”

The way his eyes are sort of lit up over this has me reeling.

I’m not sure why, when, or how he ever started doing this, but it’s safe to say I’m completely mesmerized by it. And by the mere fact that he’s sharing it with me…

This strange little quirk, this peculiar, fully adorable vulnerability that I’m almost positive he’s never shared with anyone before.

I can’t even find words to speak, and my silence must trip him up, because he glances at me, unease framing his hazel eyes. “I’m a total weirdo, right? It’s okay, you can just say it…”

“Oh…” I shake my head, grabbing him by the wrists before he can squirm away in humiliation. “Ohh no, no, no. This is so very bad… Is superstar quarterback Kyran Harbor *cute*??” I gasp, and his visible dread retreats, a small smile tugging at his lips. “This is going to make it virtually *impossible* for me to ever hate you again!”

His grin widens while I kiss both of his palms. But he bites it away, forcing one of his scowls. “I’m sure if you try real hard, you can find your way back there.”

“Nope. Please don’t grouch all over this new image I have of you,” I hum, and he chuckles, trying to rip his hands away. But I won’t let him. “Seriously, this is detrimental, Kyran. If you’re not careful, you might just weasel your way out of enemy territory and into the land of friends.”

Slowly releasing my grip, I lower his hands onto my chest, and he takes one of mine back, drawing more lines over my palm.

“And what happens… when you leave that place?” He peeks up at me for a split second before returning to my hand, a nervous, almost innocent air about him while he chews on his bottom lip. “Is that the end of the line? Friend Land?”

My heart is lurching slowly up my throat as I shake my head. “I think there might be another place. But… no one’s ever been there.” He blinks wide eyes at me. “It’s pretty vacant.”

“Like an abandoned amusement park?” he murmurs quietly, and I nod.

“Yea. I’ve never met anyone who just… went there willingly.”

“If I wanted to go…” he says, barely audibly with his lips shivering mere inches from mine. “Would you take me?”

I can barely even fathom what we’re talking about… What we’re dancing around like two relationship virgins, too terrified to say the actual words.

But my pulse is racing, and my fingers are twitching with what I think he’s asking me.

“If you were sure…” I whisper, the air around us growing hazy with something other than lust. Something deeper and scarier… More potent. “If you were… *comfortable* going there…” I gulp. “It would be your call, Ky. Because there’s absolutely no way I could keep you out.”

He makes a soft noise, inching up to my lips to press the sweetest, most unsure confession of a kiss on my mouth. In an instant, we’re both panting, hands clasped together while our lips move in mutual apprehension.

Is this really what he wants…?

Could Kyran Harbor actually want to be more *than just my stepbrother who hates me, my business partner, or even my friend?*

It’s always seemed impossible to consider, but here we are… Kissing and touching, and it has absolutely nothing to do with sex, or money. This is about emotion, which we seem to have spilling over at the moment.

It’s been happening slowly for a while… this change that suddenly seems so drastic.

We don’t hate each other. Far from it.

In fact, I think we might…

My phone starts ringing, startling us both out of the reverie we were working up to together. Kyran crawls back, breathing heavily while I answer the phone.

“H-hello?” I stutter, trying to shake myself out of it.

“Yea, hey, it’s DoorDash,” a guy says over the phone. “I’m downstairs.”

“Shit… fuck.” I jump up, darting into the bedroom to put on actual clothes. “Sorry. I’ll be right down.”

The guy chuckles at my cursing, but I hang up before he can say anything else, slipping my hat on my head and stepping into my sneakers.

“The food’s here,” I tell Kyran on my way to the door. “I’ll be right back.”

He nods, staring at nothing with his bottom lip pinched between his thumb and forefinger, as if he's deeply reeling from what just happened.

I'm sure he is. It was very intense.

But I don't have time to think about it right now, because I need to go grab his food.

Downstairs, I find a guy with a plastic bag standing in the lobby. He's pretty young… Actually, he looks like he might be in college himself, though I don't recognize him.

He smirks as I stalk over, taking the bag from him.

"Sorry about that." I flash him a smile that's only slightly flustered.

"Don't worry about it." His own grin widens a bit, and I'm frozen in place for a second, because call me crazy, but is he giving me the flirty eyes?

The dude glances up at my hat, narrowing his gaze as he slowly looks me over.

Okay, this is weird. Is he checking me out?? I need to leave.

"Holy shit," he whispers, face lighting up. "It's *you*! Hey!"

My eyebrow arches, and I give him a look like he might be a li'l loco. "Uh… I'm sorry. Have we met?"

"No, no." He chuckles, keeping his voice down as he leans in closer. "I subscribe to your OnlyFans."

All the color drains from my face. I feel it happening as I stand there, frozen, clutching a bag of takeout.

"I'm obsessed with your content," he goes on, having a little fanboy moment. And I'm freaking the fuck out inside. "I love you and **Not_Your_Baby** together." He glances around the room. "Are you with him right now??"

Something snaps me back into focus, and I shake my head, forcing the most polite smile I can manage while I back away from him slowly. "Um… yea. I mean, no! No, I'm… Hey, thanks for the food. It's always great to… meet a… fan."

The words are barely out of my mouth before I'm turning and high-tailing it out of there. I almost make it to the elevator, but a familiar female voice stops me.

"Avi!"

Whipping around, my eyes bug out of my head at Frankie, who's clomping over to me in her black furry boots.

“Shhh!” I look to the door where my *fan* is leaving, throwing another excited grin my way.

“What’s your problem?” Frankie huffs.

“Jesus fucking Christ, my name… You said my *name*.” I rub my eyes. “He probably heard you. Now he’s gonna tell everyone. Oh God, fuck me.”

“*Who* heard me? Why are you freaking out…” She pushes the button for the elevator. “Did you already talk to Zeb??”

I give her a puzzled look. “No. Why… What happened to Zeb?”

“Nothing happened to him,” she whispers, looking around before she says, “Look, I came here to talk to you. Shit might be hitting the fan a little…”

There’s a very sickening feeling of unease slinking around my gut as the elevator pings and I step inside, pressing the button for my floor. “I really wish you would’ve called first…”

“I tried texting you.” She follows me inside. “You didn’t answer.” She leans up against the wall while the doors slowly close. “Why did you leave before midnight last night?? Were you going to meet up with Kyran?”

I don’t even have the energy to lie or make up some story right now, sighing, “Yea. He came over. And he’s still here, so you can’t stay.”

Frankie gasps, her mouth stretching into an elated smile as she does this little hop. “Oh my *God*, are you two in love?!”

“What?! No!” I hiss. “Shut up, okay?? Don’t pull that shit in front of him. He’ll totally freak out.”

“Sorry, sorry.” She nods, visibly collecting herself, though she’s still shimmying around while the elevator comes to a stop. “But he spent the night! That has to mean something, Avi. You guys aren’t just fucking anymore.”

“I can’t do this right now,” I grumble, barely waiting for the doors to open all the way before I’m lunging through and power-walking up the hall. “Stay here for one sec.”

Slipping inside my dorm, I close the door in her face before she can try to push her way inside. Kyran is still sitting on the couch, his knee bouncing while he stares at the TV.

Gnawing nervously on my lip, I wander over with his food. “Hey, so, uh… Frankie’s here.”

He stands up fast. “She’s *here*??” I nod. “Can’t you tell her to leave?”

I shake my head, nodding toward the door. “She’s right outside.”

“What the fuck…” he grunts under his breath, stalking quickly into the bedroom, I’m assuming to get dressed.

“So I’ll just leave your food… here?” I drop the bag onto the coffee table, wringing my hands over and over.

I have to tell him about the delivery guy who recognized me. And I’m *sure* he won’t be pleased. But I guess I should deal with Frankie first, and whatever shitstorm she decided to bring over, unannounced.

“Babe…” I call to Kyran, wandering over to the bedroom. “Are you dressed?”

I hear him shuffling around in there before he swings open the bedroom door, glaring at me. “Can you not call me *babe* when she’s here, please?”

I roll my eyes. “Kyran, it’s Frankie. We had a fucking threesome with her. She’s not going to say anything to anyone…”

He rubs his eyes, and I feel bad. He’s obviously stressed about this, not ready to be thrust into this situation. Which sucks because I thought we were making some progress only minutes ago.

Why does it always feel like one step forward, two steps back with him?

Frankie starts pounding on the door. “Are you bitches really just gonna leave me out here?!”

Growling, I stomp over to the door, opening it fast and letting her impatient ass inside. “Jesus, Frankie. Be a little bit more of a nuisance, why don’t you.”

“I’m sorry. But this couldn’t wait.” She flings her face in Kyran’s direction, grinning while he shifts awkwardly on his feet. “Hi, Ky. How are you doing, precious?”

He scowls at her, but it’s nowhere near as intimidating as usual when he’s blushing at the fact that she obviously knows why he’s here.

“Can you leave him alone, please?” I rumble. “What’s the issue?? We were just about to eat…”

“Okay, well, I’m sorry to be the bearer of bad news while you two are cozied up playing house…” She pulls her vape out of her coat pocket and rips a long drag. “But I just thought you might like to know that Zeb found your OnlyFans.”

“He what?!” Kyran barks, eyes widening in terror.

“Kyran, will you please just go eat your food?” I hiss at him. “I’m handling this.” He pins me with a glare, and I gulp, instantly backpedaling. “I’m sorry, baby.” I try to rub his shoulder, but he rips away from me. “That

was rude… I didn't mean it. I just don't want you to worry, okay? Enjoy your dinner—"

"Avi, I don't care about the fucking dinner!" he seethes.

"*Baby*." Frankie pouts. "You two are so cute together."

"You, shut up." I point at her, then return to Kyran, who's clearly freaking out, and I need to get a handle on it. "Zeb is one of my best friends, Kyran. He won't tell anyone, I swear to God." I peer at Frankie for confirmation. "*Right*?"

She nods firmly. "Totally. Zeb would never say anything." Kyran's shoulders un-hunch just a bit. Until Frankie adds, "But I think I should also tell you that he found it because a friend of his sent him the link…"

"What friend?" I gasp. "Do they go to BC??"

Frankie gives us both a sympathetic look, purposely not responding, which answers the question for her. My face drops into my hands.

"Holy fuck…" Kyran whispers. "This is it. My life is fucking over…"

"No. No, no, no, I wouldn't say that," Frankie tries to pacify him, but it's obviously not working. "It's just a couple people. And it doesn't mean anyone's gonna find out it's *you*!"

She shouts the words after him, because now he's storming around the dorm.

"What are you doing?" I ask him nervously while he emerges from the bedroom with his phone in his hand.

"Deactivating the Twitter," he grunts, fingers visibly shaking as he taps on the screen. "You need to do yours too. Right fucking now, Avi. I'm not kidding."

I nod slowly. "Okay…"

Pulling my phone out, I open the Twitter app and pull up my **Backwardz_Cap** account. *Two-hundred thousand followers, down the drain.*

Jesus… No wonder people are figuring this shit out. We're in the top .3 percent of OnlyFans…

"Alright, it's deactivated," I tell him, and he shakes his head like he's not satisfied.

"Now the Fans…" he demands, and I have to gape at him for a second.

"Kyran… Just hold on. Can't we just… talk about this for a minute?"

"*Talk* about it??" he shouts. "What is there to talk about?! Avi, this is my *life*. My fucking future is on the line here!"

“I know.” I scrape a hand over my face. “I know that, and I know you’re scared, but let’s just think about this for a second…”

“Are you fucking serious right now?” he hisses, coming at me until he’s so close I can feel him vibrating. “How is this even a debate, Avi?? Delete the fucking account. *Now*.”

My eyes flick over to Frankie, who’s hovering, looking all kinds of uncomfortable. “Frankie, can you please give us a minute?”

She nods, and leaves the dorm, stepping out into the hall. I’m not sure if she’s sticking around or just going home… I kind of want to talk to her and find out how bad she thinks this is.

But I don’t have time for that right now. Because Kyran is spinning out.

“This is all your fucking fault…” he mumbles, stalking back and forth, ripping his hair in his fists.

“*My* fault??” I gasp, shocked by what he’s saying. “You cannot *possibly* blame me for this…”

“You should’ve been more careful, Avi!” he roars. “You should’ve blurred your face, too. Because how long until someone we know puts two and two together?? You know it wouldn’t be that difficult.”

I falter for a second, a wave of hurt and anger and guilt crashing over me like a tsunami.

“You’re barely even in the subscription content, though… Only the PPV videos,” I mumble, chewing on my lip because I know it’s not entirely true.

His Twitter account never showed his face. Mine did on occasion… But the OnlyFans *definitely* showed mine. All you’d have to do is pay twelve dollars to see my face. I always blurred Kyran’s, even in the exclusive content, but still… Recently, there have been more posts of us together, outside of the pay-per-view.

Because it stopped being about the money, and started being about *us*.

Like the picture of Kyran snuggling up on my chest. His face isn’t visible, but now that I’m thinking about it, it wouldn’t be outside of the realm of possibility for someone to figure out that it’s my stepbrother in those pictures and videos.

“Are you just hellbent on fucking destroying me??” he growls. “Is that it?!”

“You sound crazy right now…” I mutter.

“*Delete* the fucking account, Avi, or so help me...”

“You’re overreacting,” I bark at him. “I’ll call Zeb! I’ll talk to his friend and find out what he knows. It’s not serious enough to flush it all down the fucking toilet!”

He covers his face with his hands and roars into them. “Avi! Wake up! We have made *plenty* of fucking money off this! Enough is enough, we have to let it go now!”

“It’s not about the fucking money!” I snap, aiming a desperate glare at him.

He stares at me, chest heaving in his state of furious duress.

“It’s not about the money…” My voice loses all traces of anger, slipping into pleading hopelessness as I whisper, “It’s about *us*.”

Kyran gapes at me, and I can tell there’s a war going on inside him… Between the part of him that understands exactly what I’m talking about, and the part that doesn’t want to. Stepping up to him, I place my hands on his chest, feeling the heat in his body and the shivers from his nerves.

“Ky… this account *is* us. It’s the whole story, played out for people who have loved watching us together. People who think we’re *special*.” I pause, swallowing over the raw vulnerability in my tone. “I know you’re used to people fawning over you, but I’m not, okay?? I never get that, from anyone but them. The *fans*. They think we’re fucking *perfect*, and it’s not just about the sex… I’ve gotten messages from people telling me how watching our videos gave them the courage to come to terms with their sexuality… From people who say they felt scared, and alone, but watching us *helped* them…”

My voice shudders as I choke back the emotion enough to tell him, “And I’ve gotten messages from people who said they could *feel* our connection… That seeing me and you *together* is more special than a million other videos of people fucking.”

My hand slides up to cup his jaw. “And I agree, baby. This isn’t about the sex, or the money anymore. It’s about *Kyran and Avi*, and I don’t… I don’t want to give this up if it means I’ll lose you, too.”

I have to drop my face, because I’m scared to death to look at him right now. I feel like I’ve been split open at the middle, all of my ugly insecurities exposed like a soft underbelly.

“Avi…” his coarse voice whispers as he takes my hands in his. “I am *begging* you to delete that account. Please, just think about me and my future… The NFL. Put the rest of it aside, just for right now, and think about how much this could fuck me over if someone found out.”

My chest caves, and I close my eyes. It feels like I just ripped my heart out of my chest and handed it to him… And he's talking about fucking *football*.

"Did you even hear anything I just said…?" I step back, bending at the waist and covering my head with my arms, because everything hurts.

"Yes. I did… Of course I did," he mumbles. "But I'm just saying that, for right now, it's not about us, it's about *me*."

"Jesus Christ, could you sound any more selfish…" I straighten and roll my eyes to the goddamn heavens.

He's being such a fucking prick right now. And I feel like a moron for even being surprised by it, because I should've *known* this would happen.

"*Me??* You think *I'm* being selfish?!" he snarls. "Avi, you're trying to convince me to leave videos that could damn my NFL career to a fiery pit of Hell up on the internet as some sort of declaration of my feelings for you, and it's fucking ludicrous! This isn't about *us*. *We* aren't in those videos. That's **Backwardz_Cap** and **Not_Your_Baby**. And I need you to see that, and fucking take it down before I lose everything I've been working for my whole life, and there is no more Kyran Harbor fucking left at all!"

Shaking my head, I feel defeated. I can't say I don't understand what he's saying, because I do. But I'm just… sick. He clearly doesn't see what I see…

We *are* in those videos. And I'm not ready to lose them… The proof that we're something *more*.

Even so, I don't have much of a choice. I won't be responsible for ruining his career, and I already feel guilty enough as it is, because for some reason, I can shake the idea that I got him into this whole thing to begin with.

"Fine. Whatever." I grab my phone and pull up the OnlyFans, tapping the button to deactivate. I'm not even really paying attention to what I'm doing, I'm just pressing buttons until it tells me the account is down. Then I mutter, "It's done. Happy?"

My eyes fling to his, and I watch as he lets out a long breath of relief, rubbing the back of his neck.

"Thank you," he whispers.

And we just stare at each other, for minutes on end, with nothing to say.

It shouldn't feel different, in theory. But it does.

In the tap of a few buttons, it's like a spell was broken. And part of me expects him to run away, like a hostage whose chains have finally been undone.

"So…" He visibly swallows down his uncertainty and asks, "What happens now?"

I just sigh and shake my head, wandering toward the living room. "Whatever the fuck you want, Kyran."

He stands, hovering across the room for suffocating moments of time before he mumbles, "Maybe I should just go…"

My eyes close and my jaw clenches. *How did I know he'd say that.…*

I don't speak another word. I *can't.* I just stare at the TV while he grabs his coat and puts on his shoes, each and every movement like a cleaver hacking away at chunks from inside my chest.

"See ya, Avi," he murmurs on his way out.

And I just sit, numb. Empty and alone…

In my abandoned amusement park.

"Just eat some of this… It's really good."

"Can't eat. Too pissed," I grunt, filling my lungs with as much smoke as I possibly can before I choke to death.

"Avi, listen to me," Frankie says, turning to face me on the couch. "I know you're upset right now because you think Kyran doesn't care about you. But just give him some time. You guys started the OnlyFans to make money, and it turned into something neither of you expected. That's not just going to disappear because you're no longer filming content together."

"Then why did he leave?" I mutter robotically, gulping back the memory of him walking out the door. "If he actually *cared* about me, as more than just a fuck-buddy slash business partner, then he would have stayed. He said he wanted to… stay."

"You had a fight," she sighs, using chopsticks to pick up one of Kyran's spicy tuna rolls. "He probably felt awkward and didn't know how to handle it. He'll be back."

“You don’t know him like I do.” I shake my head. “He’s too closed off. Hung-up on being *straight* and popular and fucking celebrated for his talents…” *Everything I’m not.* “He cares more about that stuff than he could ever care about…” My voice trails and I sniff. “Whatever…”

“I’m really sorry you’re going through this, muffin.” Frankie rubs my back, and it’s all I can do not to break the fuck down.

Only twenty minutes after Kyran left, Frankie came back. She said she was lingering around outside just in case I ended up needing her, and never in my life have I been so fucking grateful for her meddling ways.

I don’t want to be alone right now. I can’t stand the cluttered agony of my sullen thoughts.

“Do you…” she starts, then pauses, long enough for me to peer at her. “Do you think you love him?”

I pull a deep inhale, letting it out as a sigh of sorrow. “Yea, probably.”

“How did that happen, Av?” she asks, not prying, or judging, or even looking for details. She’s just asking the question, and I don’t blame her.

To the outside world, Kyran and I were just stepbrothers who hate each other. No one else knows what’s been going on these past few months. Not even Frankie, who thought we were just fucking for the money.

The fans watched the real stuff happen… the looks and the touches and the parts *between* the sex. They saw something *more*. But even they didn’t see the last few days…

Christmakkah, the drive-in… pretty much everything leading up to an hour ago.

No one else saw me falling in love with him…

“It turned into more,” I whisper. “I guess we peeled back some layers or something, and it just… I don’t know. It changed.”

Frankie shifts on the couch. “I’m gonna say something… and you might get pissed at me for it, but whatever. Do your worst,” she says firmly. “*Nothing* changed, Avi. You and Kyran have had chemistry from the fucking start. I saw it. The fans saw it. That’s what had them begging for you two to get together. People can play-act hot sex all they want, with rehearsed moves, special lighting, and camera work in fancy locations… Giving the *appearance* of real passion. But you two had something no one in this whole online sex-work game has…”

I roll my head in her direction, lifting my brows in wait.

“You actually fucking *want* each other,” she says. “For real. It wasn’t an act between you two. It never was… Not even close. Whether you claim you hated each other is irrelevant. You never actually did.”

I’m staring at her for several heavy seconds, my lips parting while my limbs shake. I have no real words to say other than the obvious… *I do love him.*

I have no idea how it happened, but it did, and now I just want him back.

But before any of it can come out, the sound of keys jingling in the door pulls our attention to the right. It swings open, and in stalks a tall dude with dark hair and a vaguely familiar face, carrying a duffel bag.

He steps inside, drops the bag with a thunk, and tilts his head at us. “I’m your roommate… Ash Holloway.” We’re both just gawking at him. And he grins. “Sorry I’m late.”

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CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

i.throw.a.frisbee01: you both are so cute together btw what size are you? My mouth would be the perfect fit.
BoozyBaby: I would give anything for someone to look at me the way Backwardz_Cap looks at you Not_Your_Baby.

Kyran

The Eagles are going to the *fucking* Rose Bowl.

Last night, we played our final playoff game of the season against Ohio State. And we *won*…

Barely.

It was one of the worst games I've played in my life. We were down for most of it, and let's just say, it was mainly my fault. I couldn't focus. I was scattered, torn-up, distracted and just off. As Austin Powers would say, I'd lost my *mojo*.

The defense and our running backs carried the game well into the third quarter, and Coach was fucking irate. He's never screamed at me the way he did last night… I thought the vein in his forehead was going to pop.

Our defensive players really showed their skills, keeping the Buckeyes's scoring down as best they could. By the fourth quarter, we were trailing them by two touchdowns and a field goal. That was when Guty stepped in.

We'd just recovered the ball from an interception thrown by Ohio's QB. We were on their twenty-five-yard line when Coach called a timeout, and Guty grabbed me pretty much by the scruff of my neck.

"Kyran, listen to me." He got in close to my face, somehow whispering and shouting at the same time. "I don't know what's going on with you, but it ends now, you got it?? You have come *too far* to lose this because of

some funk. Whatever's got you all fucked up, just set it aside and focus on doing you."

I could barely breathe, I was so overwhelmed. Every single thing was weighing on me, like brick and mortar being stacked right on top of my shoulders. The insecurities I spend all day every day stuffing down were coming up my throat and out of my pores.

You're not good enough.

You're weak. You're worthless.

You're scared.

This *is the real you… Not the superstar they see on the outside.*

You're a pathetic, broken little failure…

Why would you think he'd ever want you?

The noise of the crowd shouting and hollering for the other team swarmed me, growing so loud I was downright quaking.

My lungs were tight as I closed my eyes and shook my head… "I'm gonna lose this game, bro. I don't know what I'm doing… I think I'm h-having a p-panic attack…"

Guty's fingers dug into my shoulders, and he shook me hard until my eyes snapped open. "Cut the shit, Nueve! That's not you. You're the best goddamn quarterback in the division, and you don't go down without a fight."

Those words stuck in my head, a memory shimmering… of Avi, dressed up in his stupid eagle costume, telling me the same thing.

"You don't go down without a fight… Trust me, I know."

The thought of it brought a shivering grin to my lips, and I huffed a small chuckle.

He looks like such an idiot in that mascot outfit… The way he does the Moonwalk and the Electric Slide. Such a damn goofball, I swear to God.

"It's not over until it's over," his voice rung through my mind.

"It's not over…" I muttered, straightening my shoulders. "It's not fucking over."

"Damn fucking straight!" Guty shouted, slapping me hard on the back. "Now let's go fucking win this thing, baby!"

I'm not your baby… My grin widened, and I slapped my hands together, muscles stiffening with determination. *I'm his.*

"Let's fucking do this!" I smashed my helmet into Guty's while he growled back.

After that, I was on a mission. A mission to undo the mess I'd made of this game. Within thirty seconds, I sunk a touchdown pass to Guty.

On our next drive, another.

Everyone around me was freaking the fuck out, but for the first time all night, I was calm. I was in my zone… And every time I glanced at the sidelines, I imagined Baldwin the fucking Eagle over there doing his stupid hip-thrust thing. It made me laugh, and people probably thought I was nuts, but whatever.

I would *not* lose tonight. It was the only thing in the world of which, at that point, I was fully certain.

With thirty seconds left in the game, we just needed to get into field goal range so Theo could work his magic. But I had other plans.

At the snap, I two-stepped, locking eyes on my best friend, the best damn wide receiver in the ACC, maybe in the whole division, as he took off down the field. He was like the fucking Roadrunner, sprinting like a maniac, breaking so far from the Buckeyes's defense, there was no way they'd ever catch up to him.

And then I launched the ball like a fucking rocket blasting off into outer space, damn near dislocating my shoulder to send it sailing in a perfect spiral. It was a long-shot… The longest I'd ever attempted.

But it sloped right into Guty's reaching arms at the ten-yard line. *Eighty-two yards* up the field. And he jogged his way into the end zone to win us the game.

What an incredible high, man. Coming back from one of the most disastrous games I'd ever played, to throwing the longest touchdown pass, not only of my career, but of the season as a whole… One of the longest the league has ever seen. Smashing all kinds of records. It was the biggest rush of my life.

But when my thrilled gaze flew to the sidelines, he wasn't there… *The mascot.*

And my smile faded a bit, homesickness setting in with some other things… Regret and unrest. The win would have felt much better at home, that was for sure.

But in the moment, I pushed past it enough to focus on celebrating with my teammates. We would play for the Division I Championship.

Just one more big victory calling my name.

We had some fun last night in Ohio, but it was agreed upon by all that the real partying would commence when we got back to Boston. Guty and I are throwing a huge party tonight in our dorm. In fact, the entire floor will be raging as a whole.

And I'm excited, yes. But I'm also racked with the same anxious uncertainty that's been plaguing me for days.

I haven't talked to Avi at all since our fight. Not a word… *Radio silence.*

Dozens of times over the week leading up to the game, I considered going over there to see him. To apologize for walking out when I know all he wanted was for me to stay.

But every time I'd put my shoes on and go for the door, something would stop me. I hate to think that it's fear… But I'm sure that's exactly what it is.

Because I *do* want to see him… *I want to see him so bad.*

I want to tell him I'm sorry for being an asshole about the OnlyFans, and making the whole shitty situation about me. I've gone over what happened in my brain hundreds of times, and I can't get past what a whiny, entitled ass-hat I was being.

Yes, I'm still nervous as hell about people from school finding Avi's account. I'm scared that they'll figure out it was me in those videos and I'll be kicked off the team, or worse… Kicked out of school altogether. Disgraced for making gay porn for money, and doomed to spend the rest of my life working some menial job…

Living at home, with those nightmares.

It would be an epic disaster, but still… I handled the whole thing wrong. I should've stayed and talked to Avi about it instead of just fighting with him and running away.

After I told him I wanted to stay, too…

I'm sure he's back to hating my fucking guts. That must be why he hasn't texted or called me once in the week since our fight… Not even to congratulate me on the game. It's ripping me up inside.

But the fear of what he was saying that night… of how close we came to something that still frightens me down to my core… it's kept me firmly planted in place. Back in my warm bubble of avoidance and denial, which doesn't feel so warm anymore now that I know how much warmer it is when I poke my head out.

That one week, from Christmas to New Years, was the best time of my whole life. And I can shove it down, keep pretending it was just sex, or something to pass the time, but no one's buying that shit anymore. Not even me.

And to make matters worse, tomorrow is the team banquet. Every member of the team is supposed to be there with their families, *including* the mascot. I don't know if Avi plans on attending…

So even as we're setting things up, preparing to get wild and rowdy tonight in the name of epic celebration, there's still this *awareness* itching inside me, knowing full well that when the shots are flowing and the music is bumping, and the girls are surrounding me with flirtatious looks and teasing touches, all I'll want to do is what I've been doing for months now…

Leave the stupid party and go over to his place instead.

Because it's where I really want to be.

And I don't want to wait for that to inevitably happen. I need to talk to him *now*. To figure out what's going on with us…

If there even is an us*, without the fans.*

"Hey…" I mumble to Guty, who's lugging things around in preparation of the party, which is supposed to start in a couple of hours. "I've gotta run out for a sec."

Stepping into my shoes, I pull my coat on. *I'm actually going this time.*

"You'll be back for the party, right?" he asks, arranging bottles of liquor on the counter. "Lots of luscious ladies eager to get their hands on Number Nine Inches."

He cackles at the look of horror on my face. "Please stop calling me that. It makes it seem like you've spent time personally getting to know my dick."

He grins and winks, though his eyes are lingering on me in a studious way that has me bolting for the door.

I know it's all in my head. *If Guty heard some kind of rumor about me having sex with Avi on OnlyFans, he definitely would've said something.*

I'm dashing into the hall as he calls out, "You better be back here for this party!"

No promises, bro.

Nerves and angst are tumbling around in my stomach like clothes in a dryer while I stomp up the road to the Thomas More Apartments. My heart

is in my throat for every agonizing second of the elevator ride to the fourth floor, fingers wiggling, toe tapping rapidly to match the race of my pulse. When the doors finally open, I step out into the hall, sucking in long gulps of air with each step until I'm in front of his door…

446. The place that feels more like home to me than any other…

Because it's where *he* is.

Knocking on the door, I shift awkwardly, feeling like I should have called first. But this is what I do. I show up here unannounced, and he lets me in. It's our thing.

Except that this time, when the door flings open, I'm greeted by a different person. *Literally.*

A guy with shaggy black hair and a lip piercing, who looks awfully familiar for some reason, is standing inside the dorm in nothing but his boxers, eating an apple.

I'm so stunned, I feel like Medusa just turned me to stone.

"May we help you?" the guy chirps, chewing and swallowing while I gawk at him, not breathing, not blinking.

My heart isn't even beating anymore.

"Uh… Avi…" The words croak from inside my throat, and I clear it. "Is Avi… here?"

His lips curl and he chomps into another bite of his apple, stepping aside to call out, "Aviel, darling! Someone's here for you." He peeks at me and smirks. "He'll be right out. Come in, mate. Take a load off."

That accent… He's Australian.

Inching my way inside the dorm, my gaze narrows in disbelief. "Ash Holloway??"

"In the flesh." He bows, chuckling to himself. And my eye is twitching.

The dude who stole my girlfriend in high school… is here now? In Avi's fucking dorm, half naked??

Is this some kind of sick joke?!

I feel like I might collapse, the reality of what's going on smacking me upside the head so hard I have to grip the side of the kitchen island to keep from falling down.

Why is he here…? Why isn't he wearing clothes??

Oh my God, is Avi in the shower?!

The panic attack is back with a vengeance, and I bend at the waist, breathing in as best I can, struggling to fend it off.

“Kyran…”

My face tips up as Avi saunters into the room, fully clothed and not appearing freshly showered. Still, it’s not exactly a comfort with emo asshole over there, crunching on fruit and staring at us.

Avi rushes up to me fast, his eyes wide. “What are you doing here??”

“Sorry…” I gasp, straightening and attempting a glare, though it still feels like my heart is being squeezed between two big hands. “Am I *interrupting* something?”

“No,” he whispers, pushing me farther into the kitchen for some privacy as he peeks at Ash. “It’s not what it looks like, Kyran, I swear to God…”

“Why is he here?” I growl, eyes flinging to Ash, who skips into the living room, plopping down on the couch like he owns the place. “Why is he not… clothed??”

“That’s just how he walks around, apparently.” Avi runs his hand through his hair. “*He’s* my roommate. He just showed up the other day… I guess he was, like, in rehab or something, and he just got out.” He bites his lip, the foggy blue in his eyes glistening with pleading sincerity. “Please believe me, nothing happened.”

I can’t help the wave of relief that washes over me at his words, the tightness in my chest easing up a bit. I don’t think he’s lying to me… *He doesn’t seem like he’s lying.*

Nodding subtly, I try to remember why I came here and what I was going to say, but it’s all been smashed to bits by the fact that there’s another person in our shared space. The place that’s been just *ours* for so long… is now infested with one asshole intruder.

“I… I just came to…” My voice trails when Ash gets up and trots over to us, tossing his apple core in the garbage right next to me. Lowering to a whisper, I lean in closer to Avi. “I wanted to talk to you… to apolog—”

“Holy fucking shit!” Ash gasps, and we both glare at him. “Now I remember where I know you from! We all went to high school together!” He laughs and shakes his head. “You’re Avi’s stepbrother, am I right?”

My teeth are clenched together so tightly I can almost feel them snapping. “Yea… And you fucked my girlfriend senior year.”

He brings a hand to his chest like he’s appalled. “*I* did that?” I nod, seething at him through my eyes. His brows furrow. “I’m sorry, mate. I was pretty messed up senior year. It’s all a bit of a blur…”

“Her name was Becca Hansen,” I mutter, and he purses his lips.

“Ohhh, right, right. I think I remember,” he sighs, rubbing his hands together. “I decided to try girls again for a while there.” His chin tips in Avi’s direction and he winks. “Always fun to mix it up.”

Avi’s lashes flutter, his gaze shifting uncomfortably to me as he gives me a look I can’t really read. I don’t know if he’s trying to convey annoyance for this dude who just popped up out of nowhere, or if he’s tense because they’ve been hooking up… Since apparently, they’re both bi and living together, and the guy just walks around in his underwear like he’s displaying some seductive mating call.

God, I fucking hate this. I need to get the hell out of here.

“Well, it’s been fun catching up, but I better get going,” I grunt through gritted teeth, staggering to the door.

“Kyran, wait.” Avi follows me, grabbing my arm before I can reach for the handle. “Don’t leave yet. We can go somewhere and talk…”

My body turns to him on its own, breaths shallowing at the way his smell is suddenly overwhelming my senses. It reminds me of Christmas…

I bite my lip, our eyes locked together while his plead for me to stay, and mine display how much I *really* fucking want to. But then I peer past him, at Ash goddamn Holloway, who’s just lingering there, watching us curiously.

My spine stiffens, and I shake my head. “Nope, that won’t be necessary. I just came over to… invite you to a party in my dorm tonight.”

Avi’s forehead lines, and he cringes when Ash starts singing, “Party party partyyy! We are so there!”

Gulping, I shoot Avi a furiously helpless look, cocking my brow. *We??*

He mouths the words *“nothing happened,”* shaking his head firmly like he really wants me to believe him. *I* really *want to believe him.…*

But I just sigh, exhausted by this whole ordeal, as I turn back to the door. “Alright, then. I’ll see you both in a few hours.”

Pulling open the door, I hear Ash crooning, “Bye!” Then he whispers to Avi, “What’s his name again??”

“*Kyran*,” Avi growls, and Ash hollers, “Byee, Kyran!”

Slamming the door behind me, I stomp up the hall, fuming my way into the elevator. But once I’m inside, I collapse into the wall, fisting hands in my hair.

What the fuck?? It wasn’t supposed to happen like that…

This party officially has disaster written all over it.

Music is thumping. Drinks are flowing.

Kyran is obsessing, Kyran is raging.

I've been doing my best to forget what happened earlier, by drinking as much as it takes to subdue my racing thoughts, but even that isn't working. Now, instead of simply fixating on all the bullshit in my life, I'm doing so while intoxicated, which only doubles the frustration, confusion, and general agony I've been feeling for a week.

Avi still hasn't made an appearance, and I can't stop thinking about the reason for his absence…

Is he hooking up with Ash?

Are they banging out a quickie before the party?

Are they filming themselves fucking for Avi's new and improved OnlyFans, because all he really needed was a body and now I've been replaced??

I'm probably fucking insane… In fact, I *know* I am. But I can't fight away the idea that the reason Avi was so bummed about shutting down the OnlyFans was because he just loves the *attention*. And since *I'm* the one who can't be a part of it anymore, it would only make sense that he'd find someone new to fuck for money.

Spiraling, I bring my cup to my lips, taking a large gulp of some potent drink Bea gave me. Theo invited her, and in turn, she invited all of her friends, like Micah and Frankie, and the judgy one who wears the ostentatious outfits… *What's his name again?*

Oh yea. Zeb.

The one who knows about the OnlyFans.

I've been watching him casually since he got here, and not once has he given me a smirky look that would indicate him having seen me get fucked by my stepbrother. He's not even paying any attention to me at all, and dread slowly retreats as I consider that maybe I *did* overreact.

Avi was right. My face was never in any of the content. Someone would have to really be digging to piece it together, and I just don't see random kids at BC going through that kind of detective work for no reason.

I just feel fucking stupid about the whole thing. To blame Avi was a low blow, and the guilt is still churning in my gut. After all, I *agreed* to it. I'm a consenting adult.

I wasn't coerced or tricked. I *chose* to have sex on camera because I needed the money, and whatever happens, I should have to suffer the consequences right alongside my partner. *Business* partner.

Former…

Ugh.

Glancing across the room, I spot Frankie, and she looks up, locking her eyes with mine. She shoots me this sympathetic smile, and though it could be because of the mess I find myself in, something about it feels heavier than that.

It feels like the look someone gives you when they know you're dealing with a break-up, and it makes my skin crawl.

Avi and I didn't break up. *We were never together.*

We're just friends and stepbrothers.

The business *is over, that's all.…*

Swallowing hard, my lips part, and Frankie starts walking over like she's coming to talk to me, sucking me in with the magnetic need to confide in someone. I'm getting so damn sick of always carrying everything around myself. Just this once, I want to be able to break down and spill my guts.

But before she can make it over, two new people burst into the room.

Both tall, dark-haired emo boys with painted fingernails and rips in their black jeans. Except that one is a scrawny asshole, and the other is… Well, he's *Avi*.

Ash saunters into the room, dragging Avi along by his arm, and I feel like I'm being stabbed repeatedly in the chest by a blunt object just seeing them arrive together… *touching*. Frankie greets them, whispering something to Avi as she kisses his cheek. And Avi's gaze immediately flings in my direction, his eyes somehow shimmering both desire and unease my way.

Avi says hello to his friends, and my feet are anchored to the floor, even though I'm vibrating with this overwhelming urge to walk over to him.

But I don't.

I just stand here, sipping my millionth cocktail of the evening, watching him speak to Zeb, who's giving him a sly look, whispering things that have Avi rolling his eyes—most likely about the *Fans*. But neither of them looks

over here, so I guess that means I'm alright for now. My reputation is safe, and I can breathe easier.

I *should* be able to… But it still doesn't seem to be happening as *easily* as I'd like it to.

In an effort to distract myself, I allow a few of my teammates to pull me into a game of beer pong, schooling them all, as usual, even with only partial focus, while the majority of it remains across the room.

Ash is hanging all over Avi, throwing his arm around Avi's shoulder and speaking way too close to his ear. I'm trying not to let it bother me, but when Avi pulls away, and Ash's hand slides casually down the length of his back, I end up crushing one of the ping-pong balls in my fist.

The booze swimming in my bloodstream is making things hazy, some song by The Weekend weaving its smooth beats all around the room packed with grinding bodies. A few different girls are looking at me, some of them coming over to flirt and giggle and touch my chest. But I just keep inching away because it doesn't feel right. And the fact that it *doesn't* is stressing me out even more.

A hand much larger than those of the girls drops onto my shoulder, and my face shifts. His scent gives him away before our eyes even meet. But then they do, and a blue that looks like storm clouds locks me in place and shallows my breathing.

"Hey…" Avi rumbles, casually enough, though his gaze is saying way more than just that one stupid word. "Can we talk?"

I start to nod like an instinct. But then I glance around at all the people, and I shake my head instead. "I don't think that's a good idea." Bringing my cup to my lips, I nod in the direction of his friends. "It's a party. Just go have fun."

"Kyran, don't do this," he sighs, audibly upset, but keeping his voice down so no one overhears us. "You made your point, and the business is done, but… is that really it?" He blinks at me; a fluttering look of gloom.

"I don't know what you want me to say…" I shrug, my body pulling this unaffected bullshit while my heart is *screaming* something completely different.

He licks his lips, running his fingers through his hair. "I want you to tell me I was wrong… that ending it didn't *end* it." He looks around quickly before whispering, "Us."

And I *do* want to tell him that. I know I do, but I fucking *can't*. Because it doesn't make any sense.

I can't have feelings for him, because I'm not gay.

That's the *truth*, the same one I've been clinging to like a child clutches his blankie. I can't fucking deal with accepting anything else. It's too big, too confusing.

Too much.

"But *us* was just an act." I choke out the words. "For the fans… Remember? That's all it was supposed to be, the whole time." Rubbing my eyes, I let out a jagged sigh. "Fuck, Avi, I didn't ask for any of this…"

The look on his face is slaughtering me. He's all helpless frustration in those wide gray eyes… I can't stand seeing it.

This is why I didn't go over there all week. This is what stopped me… Having to see him looking at me like that.

"Stop being such a coward and admit that this is just you running away again," he hisses. "God, you're so afraid to admit that something changed —"

"You're right," I bark quietly, cutting him off. "Something *did* change. I stopped hating you. We're brothers, *friends*. And that's a good fucking thing, Avi." I shake my head slowly. "But that's all. It has to be…"

He squares his shoulders, jaw clenching as he murmurs right by my ear, "You never *really* hated me, Kyran. We both know you didn't…"

Then he turns and storms away, leaving me shaking and chugging the rest of my drink in two large gulps.

My limbs are heavy as I watch him return to his friends, wedging himself in between Micah and Ash. Ash slings his arm around Avi's shoulder once more, grinning at him, and Avi's lips curve into one of his carefree smiles.

Grabbing the nearest bottle, I pour a bunch into some cups and shout, "Who wants shots?!" To which a bunch of people cheer, rushing over.

Lexi wanders up to me, smooshing her boobs into my side as she takes a cup. Tapping mine on hers, I whip it back, handing a few out to nearby people while she scoots up to whisper in my ear.

"I can't wait to see you looking all sexy in your suit tomorrow night," she hums, trailing her nails down my back.

I'm so numb I can barely feel it.

I tilt a bemused look at her, and she giggles. "For the banquet, silly."

“Right,” I slur. “The fuckin *banquet*.” I gulp back another shot. “How could I forget…”

“I think you’ll love my dress.” Her lips brush my face, and I flinch. “Who knows… maybe I won’t be wearing anything underneath.”

“Hm…” I grumble, uninterested, as my eyes flick across the room once more.

Avi and his friends are now sitting on the couch…. And Ash’s hand is on Avi’s thigh.

I swallow past a sharp stab in my chest, mumbling, “Look, Lexi… whatever we did in the past… I’m sorry, but it’s over.”

“Over??” she gasps. “Why?”

Inching away from her roaming hands, I huff, “Because it could never work. I’m… into someone else.”

She starts whining something, but I’m not even listening. I’m too busy watching another hand. And the way it’s roaming up and down Avi’s thigh…

Avi doesn’t look like he’s into it, but he’s also not pushing it away either.

Why do you care?? You just told him you were only friends, and you’re barely even that, anyway. You should just go back to hating him…

Prove him fucking wrong for saying you never really hated him in the first place, because you totally *did.*

“Yo, my baby Nueve!” Guty staggers over, handing me a new drink. “This party is litty, mi amigo.”

“Cheers to that, motherfucker.” I knock my cup against his, spilling booze everywhere as I take a sip.

“I’m gonna be so hungover tomorrow,” he grumbles. “Thank God the banquet isn’t until seven.”

“The goddamn *banquet*,” I scoff, staring at Ash Holloway’s shameless attempts at feeling up my stepbrother. “Why do we even have to go to that?? There are certain people I *don’t* wanna see, if you know what I mean…”

“I feel you, brother,” Guty hiccups.

I don’t think he’s really listening to me, but whatever. I’m too busy glaring at Avi and his new *pal*, hanging all over each other.

Frankie also appears to be watching the way Ash is touching Avi. She glances up at me, our eyes locking again in another one of those wordless

passes of conversation. Her brows zip together, and she shakes her head subtly.

I simply purse my lips and shrug, sipping my drink.

What does she expect me to do?? Run over there, pull Ash off my stepbrother… Make a fucking scene in front of everyone to prove once and for all that this ache in my chest whenever I'm around him is real?? That every time I look at him, my stomach flips and my skin buzzes and no matter how hard I've tried to push it away and pretend like it's not there, it just seems to be getting fucking stronger*, to the point where I feel like pieces of my anatomy are missing when I'm not with him…*

I can't do that. *Because who even knows what that stuff means, anyway…*

"Where's Theo?" I distract myself with meaningless words, spinning around to get my stupid eyes away from that stupid couch where all that dumb shit I don't care about is happening.

"I think he left with someone…" Guty tugs on my arm. "'Who do you think I should hook up with tonight?"

"Dude, I don't care," I slur, eyelids drooping. "Hook up with whoever you want." I shoot a forced smirk at him. "Who do you think *I* should hook up with tonight?"

Guty chuckles, pinching my cheeks while I fight him off. "You know you can hook up with whoever you want."

"I need to hook up with someone *new*…" I rasp, barely even aware of what I'm saying. "I need to fuck away the last one."

"Who…? Lexi?"

Grunting in lieu of an actual response, my eyes land on these two girls dancing. Their tits are all rubbing together and whatnot, and I start chewing on the inside of my cheek.

That totally used to do something for me… Didn't it?

I could've sworn I really liked it before…

"Whoa! Hello…" Guty shouts next to my face, and I cringe. "Look at this…"

I assume he's talking about the girls grinding on each other, and I nod, blinking heavily as I wait for my dick to remember that he likes girls.

"Man, I didn't know your stepbrother played for both teams." Guty chuckles.

My face swings in his direction. "What…?"

Muscles all over my body are stiffening in unease as he nods across the room. Following his gaze, my stomach falls so fast it's like I was just shoved out of an airplane.

Avi… My chest caves, crushing my heart between my ribs as my eyes widen.

Avi is kissing Ash… Or Ash is kissing Avi. Whatever… *however* it's happening, it's happening. They're fucking *kissing*.

No…

I'm fucking *bleeding* inside. My body is splitting down the middle, like I'm being violently bisected with rusty tools.

I can't move. I can't breathe. I'm just stuck here, in purgatory, staring on as Ash Holloway's stupid bitch fingers slide up Avi's neck into his hair, and he sucks and bites on Avi's lips.

Those lips… I… I thought they were… for me.

I'm about to fucking fall to my knees because I just can't keep my body upright anymore. The red solo cup is being gripped so hard in my fist, it cracks, and liquor spills down my arm.

Guty laughs and whoops. "Get some, Av!"

"No…" I whimper, then clear my throat. "No." Tossing the cup onto the floor, I growl, "No. No, no, no. *Fuck* that."

Can't watch. Can't let this happen.

I stomp in their direction, but Guty grabs my arm, chuckling, "Yo, what are you doing??"

"I'm gonna fucking kill that asshole," I seethe, gasping at the sight of Avi trying to pull away from the kiss.

He's pulling away. He doesn't want it.

Too bad it's already been going on for *way* too many seconds.

Fuck! Fuck fucking this! I hate this!

Pushing people out of the way, I storm over to the couch with wrath burning like hot molten lava in my veins.

Anger, frustration, hatred, confusion. The gang's all here. My adrenaline is jacked right now, and I'm about to rage so hard I think I might seriously hurt someone.

Avi's eyes are open with Ash's mouth trailing his jaw, and they widen when he spots me. He dips away from Ash as fast as possible, crashing onto Zeb's lab and spilling his drink everywhere.

"You bitch!" Zeb stands up, drenched in booze. "This is Prada!"

Lunging, I grab Ash Holloway by his arm, hauling him to his feet and whipping him across the room. He goes flying into a bunch of people, and everyone topples into a pile of bodies.

“Kyran! Wait—” Avi shouts.

“Dude, mellow!” Guty hollers.

But it’s too late. I’m already launching myself at Ash, grabbing him by the throat and slamming him onto the floor.

“Don’t fucking touch him!” I snarl over Ash’s face, all semblance of control lost. I may have blacked out. My body is working on total impulse, the need to destroy this fucking prick for kissing *my* Avi taking over every fiber of my being. “He’s not yours, you *hear me?!*”

My fist cocks back, but someone grabs my arm. Several someones.

At least four of my teammates are holding me back, trying to pry me off of Ash, while Ash just lies there on the floor beneath me, blinking wide, baffled eyes up at my face.

“Harbor, stop!” someone says. I think it’s Fellows. “Don’t do this, bro. Think about it…”

I… don’t… fucking… care.

My anger is visceral. I can’t find my way out of it. All I see are flickers in my mind…

A dark room.

My father’s disappointed face.

A rosary wrapped around a weathered hand…

“Fuck!” I roar.

And even with four of them on me, they can barely lift me off of Ash while I fight to get back down there and bash his fucking face in for kissing those lips.

Avi’s smile slips away… When I tell him he has no clue who he is.

All the times I brushed him off… Knocked books out of his hands in high school, called him a loser in front of my friends…

All the times I walked out on him.

They’re all flashing through my thoughts, blinding me with so much emotion, I can barely breathe. Like a slideshow, it’s playing in broken clicks.

Bedsheets wrapped around us… His fingers treasuring me with touch, his hair hanging in his eyes.

Laughing, smiling, kissing, breathing…

I'm fucking *drowning* in it. The way it changed.

The way he became *mine*.

"Fucking let me go," I grunt, sniffling as I whip myself out of their hold, jumping off of Ash and stumbling away.

Sucking air into my lungs as best I can, I keep my head down while I pant, rushing out of the dorm with Guty by my side, his hand on my back.

"It's all good," he calls out to the rest of the party, loud but calm. "We just need some air. Everyone's fine."

I can feel eyes *staring* at me, and it's like a huge fluorescent interrogation light shining in my face as I stomp past the lingering bodies, up the hallway, putting space between me and this prying situation.

Adrenaline is still buzzing me from head to toe, and I no longer feel drunk. But now the despair is overwhelming the fuck out of the anger, and I just need to sit down.

Breathe. Relax.

You're here… You're fine.

Guty brings me to a quiet end of the hall where I rip myself away from him and start pacing, yanking my hair in my fists.

He watches me with worried eyes. "You good?"

"No. No, I'm not fucking *good*," I hiss, shaking my head.

"What's your problem with that dude, anyway?" he asks carefully.

"He's a fucking prick!" I growl.

"Why?? What even happened—"

"He stole my girlfriend in high school, and now he's stealing my—" My voice cuts out quick, and I blink at Guty, who's staring at me like I'm nuts. Shifting my tone, I mutter, "He was practically molesting my fucking stepbrother. Forgive me for trying to defend him…"

You sound like such a whacko.

Guty's head tilts. "I don't know, bro… It looked like Avi was enjoying himself."

"What do you know about what he fucking *enjoys*…" I scrub my face with my palms.

I'm fully aware that I'm making myself look bat-shit crazy right now, but I can help it. I can't stop picturing Ash's mouth touching Avi's and it's driving me fucking mental.

Guty is quiet for a while until eventually he clears his throat. "Alright, kid. I'm hearing you. I just don't want you to do something stupid that

could fuck us all over."

I nod fast, leaning up against the wall with a crash. "I get it. I'm sorry…"

"Don't be. Nothing happened." He squeezes my shoulder. "I'm gonna go make sure everyone's chill… No one's calling campus security or any dumb shit."

I nod again, rubbing my eyes while he clomps up the hall. I hear him mumbling to someone, and my eyes shoot open to see who's coming, desperately wanting it to be…

"Oh. Hey…" I sigh as Frankie pads over to me, barefoot and carrying her shoes.

"Don't look so excited to see me," she mumbles in amusement.

"Sorry, I just…"

I wanted it to be him.

"Avi wanted to come talk to you, but I told him to give you space." She leans up against the wall by my side. "Kyran, I totally understand why you're freaking out. Trust me, I do. But this shit is giving him whiplash."

Peeking at her, I swallow down a hard lump of emotion. "And you think it's not the same for me?? I have no fucking clue what I'm doing anymore…"

"I get it," she says softly. "It's scary… coming to terms with stuff."

My stomach flops aggressively. "You're not talking about OnlyFans, are you…?"

She chuckles. "No. I'm not."

Letting out a ragged sighs, I scrape a hand over my face and whisper, "He's my stepbrother, Frankie…"

"So?" She scoffs. "He's not your actual brother."

I chew on my lip. "But I'm not… I mean, I didn't think I was…"

"But you *are*," she breathes.

Her tone is firm, and calming. Supportive. Like she's stating a fact.

And maybe it's okay. *Maybe it's not the end of the world… to want him.*

To want more *from him.*

"Stop running from it, Ky." She nudges me.

Slanting my chin down, I give her a grateful nod. It feels good to have just one person in the whole world who knows about this.

But then she still doesn't even know the half of it.

Frankie straightens with a breath, turning to leave.

“Thanks…” I mumble, and she smiles.

“I’m rooting for you.” She winks at me.

I roll my eyes, and she laughs, wandering away while I breathe out slowly.

But she stops one last time and says, “Oh, and I’m bringing Avi to stay at my place. Just thought you’d wanna know…”

“Whose idea was that?” I blink at her.

“His.” She shows me a knowing look. “He doesn’t want anyone else, Kyran. You’d have to be a real moron not to see that.”

Frankie leaves, and I stay by myself in the hallway for a while, listening to the sounds of the party winding down, people trickling out. Sitting on the floor, I stare at my palm, tracing lines of highways that would bring me back to the drive-in.

I want to go back to that night, when we were happy, just the two of us.

No filming, no fighting, no *fans*.

Just me and him… Together in an abandoned place. *Like his rickety old amusement park.*

Grinning, I close my palm, admitting defeat. My actions just now were an impulse straight from the heart. No matter how confusing, this can only mean one thing, and maybe Frankie’s right.

Maybe I just need to stop running.

Pulling my phone out of my pocket, I type out a text with shaky fingers.

Me: You’re right… I never really hated you, baby.

Because I think I love you.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Peteypie89: Anyone else feel like they just got dumped?? Backwardz_Cap & Not_Your_Baby please come back! I can change!

I wake up on Frankie's couch, with Robin walking all over my stomach. She's clearly very excited to have spent the night in a new place.

Rubbing my face, I sit up and look around, releasing a breath.

What a crazy night.

I'm sure I would've been fine staying in my dorm last night. Despite the way Kyran was acting, Ash isn't a *rapist*. He was flirting with me, and then he kissed me. It wasn't really a big deal.

Okay… so I kind of let it linger because I was mad at Kyran, and I wanted to get him back for being the most stubborn, insufferable jerk I've ever had massive, complicated feelings for. But I wasn't going to let it go further than a few quick tongue lashes. And if we're being totally honest, I *really* didn't expect him to freak out the way he did.

I thought he'd make out with Lexi or something, to counteract my immaturity with more immaturity. But what he did instead was… *so* much sexier.

No, no. Violence is bad. He really needs to get that temper under control.

But I don't know, seeing him rage out and make a scene, *for* me instead of *at* me… God, it just turned up the swoon factor a zillion times more. Which is obviously very inconvenient because I still have no idea where we stand.

Even more so now that he sent me that text…

Grabbing my phone off the table, I open it and read it again, for the sixtieth time.

Kyran: You're right… I never really hated you, baby.

My lips curl into a ridiculous smile before I bite it off.

I'm glad he didn't hurt Ash, or get himself in trouble. Though he certainly raised a few questions with his outburst. Mainly from Ash, and my friends.

But I was able to smooth it over by blaming the whole thing on Ky being drunk and hating Ash from high school. They bought it for the most part. And Ash was totally remorseful, especially when I returned to the dorm to pack up Robin and a quick change of clothes.

"I feel like you think I'm some kind of Chester the Molester…" Ash whined, lingering outside the bedroom, peeking at Frankie, who was standing watch like a guard dog.

"No one thinks you're a molester," I told him with a scoff. "I kissed you back, remember? It's not your fault, Kyran just doesn't like you. And he's…" My eyes flicked to Frankie for a second. "Very protective."

"Will you give me his number so I can apologize?" he pleaded, while Frankie stood behind him, shaking her head and mouthing the word *no*.

"I will…" I hummed. "But not right now. Let him cool off a bit."

I slapped him on the shoulder on the way out, leaving the dorm that's been mine for nearly five months.

But truth be told, I was a little relieved to get out of there. Ash had been driving me crazy since he showed up. Especially after I found out that *he* was Zeb's friend who showed him my OnlyFans.

Seriously. What are the freaking odds?

It certainly made things more than awkward, having a roomie who's seen you in all manners of naked, cum-soaked positions. And even worse was having to dodge all his questions about who **Not_Your_Baby** is, and what happened to the account.

I think it's for the best that I just crash here for a while… Until things settle down.

"Morning, sweetheart." Frankie shuffles into the room in skimpy shorts and an oversized hoodie, yawning her way to the kitchen. "Sleep well?"

"Well enough." I scoop Robin off my lap and set her down on the couch, wandering over to where Frankie is making coffee with her fancy

cappuccino machine.

Her eyes shift. “Have any more hot phone sex with your stepbrother?” She smirks deviously, cocking a dark eyebrow.

“No.” I squint at her, tilting my head. “I’m still giving him space.”

“I saw you on your phone when I went to the bathroom in the middle of the night…” she sneers.

“He texted me,” I mumble. “And I may have fallen asleep trying to think up the perfect response.”

She chuckles, shaking her head. “You two are ridiculous. And so fucking cute it hurts.”

Leaning up against the counter, I rub my eyes hard. “What am I supposed to do about him, Frankie?? I have no clue what I’m going to say when I see him tonight at the banquet…”

“Here’s a thought.” She licks some foam off of her finger, before turning to face me. “How about telling him the fucking *truth*?”

“And what would that be…?”

“That you love him and you want him to be your grumpy boyfriend.” She grins.

I scoff. “Even if that were true… which it kinda is… he’s way too unsure. If he can’t even convince himself to be with me in *secret*, how the hell would we ever make a relationship work? He’d be terrified to tell his friends, his teammates… And our *parents*?? Forget about it.” My head swivels. “I mean, what would we even say to them? Oh, hey, so I know you guys are married and all, but your sons want to date each other. Is that cool?”

Frankie laughs, then pouts at my misfortune, rubbing my back. “If they love you, they’ll get over it.”

“My mom would,” I rumble. “But Tom is, like, this super strict Catholic dad. He and Kyran already have an awful relationship as it is…” Sighing out my despondence, I stare down at my feet. “I won’t ask Kyran to make things worse between them.”

“You shouldn’t have to ask him, Avi,” she says pointedly. “If he cares about you, he’ll just do it.”

Yea… and I don’t really want to pull at that thread.

We were *so* fucking close before the drama with the Fans blew us all out of proportion. Then last night, he says we’re *just friends*, then proceeds to almost kill Ash for kissing me.

I swear to God, I need some Dramamine for how nauseous this back and forth is making me.

"I guess I should shower, then head back to the dorm…" I sigh, weakened from the bleak state of my existence.

"You know you can stay here as long as you want," Frankie says. "And the same goes for that little peanut." She glances at Robin.

"Oh, so you like her now?" I smirk.

"She's growing on me, okay? Last night, she came into my room and purred next to my face for like an hour. It was the cutest thing ever."

I laugh. "Well, that's good, because I really don't want to deal with carting her back and forth."

Frankie looks like she's trying to subdue her excitement as she says, "You can just leave her here for the weekend, until you figure out what to do about Ash. If you want to, I mean…"

Smiling down at her, I wrap her up in my arms. "Thanks for being the best best friend ever, bae. Seriously, I don't know what I'd do without you."

"Don't thank me." She squeezes me around the waist. "Just stay here! You know you want to. The dorm was great when it was just yours, but sharing it with Ash isn't gonna work. Especially with Ky in the picture."

If Ky even wants to be in the picture…

I know Frankie is right. I have no real desire to live with Ash, knowing how fond he is of me. And Kyran will never go over there again as long as he's breathing, I'm sure of it.

It sucks, because that dorm was where it all began for us. But I also kind of want to see if we can make this work outside of TMA 446. And without the Fans…

Could we ever be more than him showing up in the middle of the night?

Would he even want that?

So many questions, and not enough answers. And it's all happening at the worst possible time, what with the banquet tonight, and then the Rose Bowl right after. As antsy as I am to figure this stuff out, I also don't want to stress Kyran out before the biggest game of his life.

Putting it all on hold, just for now, I decide to take a shower and prepare to stop by the dorm to get more of my stuff. At the very least, I should stay here through the weekend. I can figure out what to do about Ash and the dorm when I get back from California.

As I’m stepping out of the bathroom, my phone is ringing. Rushing to it with my heart in my throat, it falls a bit when I find that it’s not Kyran.

It’s the BC Admissions Office.

“Hello?” I answer, a sudden burst of nerves rattling my body.

“Avi Vega?” a female voice asks.

“Yes…”

“Hi, this is Sherry, Assistant to Dean Perkins. The dean would like to see you in her office as soon as possible.”

I gulp. “But it’s Saturday…”

“I know. Unfortunately, it’s urgent, and can’t wait until Monday.”

My pulse is immediately thumping like crazy. “Okay… Then I guess I’ll be right there.”

“Perfect. I’ll let her know you’re on your way.”

The call disconnects, and I’m left standing, frozen, with my phone clutched in my fist.

Whatever this is… I’m sure it can’t be good.

Sitting in the dean’s office, I can’t stop fidgeting.

As it stands, I don’t do well with authority figures. They make me very itchy, and the longer I sit in this prim and proper office, walls adorned with degrees and fancy plaques, the less I feel like I belong here.

Maybe it’s just the dread I’m feeling from whatever urgent matter has called me in here on a Saturday, but my insecurities are taking over. I don’t think I’ve *ever* felt like I belong in this school.

Sure, I’ve made friends, and connections I might otherwise never have come across. I’ve had fun, and I’ve learned about myself. But I feel like all of that relies heavily on the relationships I’ve made here. Not the school itself.

Basically, I’m sitting in front of the dean feeling like a big fat phony for even being here wasting her time.

Dean Perkins takes a seat at her desk, folding her hands on top of it. “Good afternoon, Mr. Vega.”

I nod, my palms sweating all over my jeans. “Your… Dean-ness.”

She squints at me. “I’ll just cut right to the chase…” She picks up her cell phone and taps a few times, turning it around to show me the screen. “Is this you?”

It’s a screengrab from my OnlyFans account. One of my more modest posts, but still a pretty scandalous thing for the dean of Boston College to be presenting you with.

I swallow hard, shaking in my boots. “I… don’t think so?”

“Is that an answer? Or are you asking me?” She’s very stern. Quite frankly, it’s scaring the shit out of me.

“Can I ask what this is about?” I struggle to regain some of my confidence.

Setting the phone down, she sits back in her seat. “I’ve received a few anonymous tips from concerned students and faculty that a student fitting your description has been engaging in… online sex work on campus. Now, either you have a twin brother I don’t know about, or this account is being run by you, Mr. Vega.”

I simply blink at her. I don’t think my vocal cords want to work at the moment.

“Avi…” she sighs. “We both know this is you. Do us both a favor and __”

“But can you prove that it’s me?” I grunt.

“Yes,” she says firmly. “Because it’s your face.”

“Maybe it’s just someone who looks like me…”

“Avi. This is a very serious matter. I’m sure you understand that we can’t have things like this occurring on campus.”

“How do you know it occurred on campus?” I keep going, standing my ground.

I don’t think she has any actual evidence. And *yea*, it’s obviously me in that picture. But if she knew for a *fact*, she’d be expelling me on the spot instead of expecting me to confess.

See? All those true crime documentaries and court case shows have paid off.

“Well, unfortunately, I have no choice but to suspend you while we investigate this matter.” She straightens, shuffling papers on her desk like it’s no big deal.

“*Suspend* me?? You have no proof!”

“That’s what we’ll be looking for, Mr. Vega.” Her lips quirk. “And if we find out that this *is* you… and that you’ve been producing pornographic videos on school property, you’ll be expelled permanently. Along with anyone else who participated.”

My jaw clenches together so hard it’s aching.

Kyran…

If they find out he was in those videos with me, he’ll lose everything.

Fuck me. This is not good.

“That’ll be all for now,” Dean Perkins says, sort of shooing me away. “We’ll be in touch.”

Standing up slowly, I glare at her from across the desk. *Call me crazy, but I don’t think this lady likes me very much.*

I leave her office in a fog of stress, heading back to Frankie’s. Zeb is coming over with a suit for me to wear to the banquet tonight, since I don’t own one. But now that I’m suspended, I’m not sure if I’ll even be welcome at the banquet.

Whatever. I’m still going. Fuck that. I need to see Kyran. Plus, I’m a member of that goddamn team, whether they want me there or not.

When I get back to Frankie’s, my anxiety is at an all-time high. Unfortunately, it seems that it’s only going to get worse.

“Oh my God!” Zeb squawks at me the second I step through the door. “What happened??”

“What are you talking about…?” I mutter, choosing to wait for him to tell me why he’s freaking out before I drop the news that I’m suspended pending allegations that I’ve been running a fucking porn studio out of my dorm.

“Did you get kicked out of school??” Frankie hustles over, clear worry on her face.

“What would make you think that?” I ask as my entire body stiffens.

How do they already know?? This is not good…

Someone’s out here running their fucking mouth, and when I find out who it is, I’m gonna lose my shit.

“Everyone’s talking about it,” Zeb says, watching me closely while I pull out my pen and take a long drag to calm my nerves. “They’re saying you got suspended because of your OnlyFans. For making porn on campus…”

“*Allegedly*,” I correct him, smoking even more; deeper.

I need to get rid of this anxiety. I'm fucking shaking.

"So it's true?" Frankie frowns.

"They're launching an investigation," I grumble. "To prove that the account belonged to me, and that I was making the videos on school property."

"And if they find it?" She blinks over wide eyes.

I shrug. "Then I'll be expelled. And so will anyone who… participated." I give her a solemn look. "If they can identify that person…"

"But I thought you said the guy you were with doesn't go here?" Zeb jumps in.

I stare at him for a second. "He doesn't. I'm just… saying…"

"This is fucked…" Frankie rubs her face.

"Well, maybe they won't figure out it was you," Zeb tries with the positivity. "The account is closed, so it's not like they can access any of your content. All they probably have are screengrabs from whoever the fuck has been ratting you out."

"Yea, and that's another thing," I grunt, aggressively brushing my hair out of my eyes. "Who the fuck is giving them all this information?? I mean, what have I done to anyone in this school? I'm basically invisible. Why do they want to take me down so bad?"

"Jealousy is a bitch," Zeb sighs. Straightening his shoulders, he takes me by the arm. "Let's not worry about this right now. I need to dress you up and make you all pretty for the ball!"

I can't help but laugh. I love this kid for making me smile when everything in my life is crashing down around me.

"It's not a *ball*." I roll my eyes, grinning. "It's a banquet. I hope you didn't bring over a fucking tuxedo for me to wear…"

"No, no. Nothing like that." He smirks. "Just my best Burberry suit, which you'll look super hot in."

I'm really not in the mood to get dressed up right now. But there's no stopping Zeb where fashion is concerned. I might as well just sit back and let him do whatever he wants to me. *It's what he'll end up doing anyway.*

"Ohhh my God, it's gonna be like Cinderella!" he squeals, walking me into Frankie's bedroom, where a garment bag is hanging up over her closet. "Baldwin the Eagle, who everyone's been shitting on all season, shows up *stunning* in designer labels, like the belle of the ball!"

My brows zip together and my lips slant into a frown. “Who’s been shitting on me all season??”

“I’m just saying,” he rasps. “You’re the underdog. No one probably even expects you to show up. And then *bam!* In you strut, looking fucking gorgeous. That’ll show that grumpy stepbrother of yours.”

At the mention of Kyran, I gulp. “Kyran won’t care…”

“Oh, yes, he will,” Zeb croons, unzipping the bag to reveal a suit that is *so* not me. But I’ll admit, it’s very nice. He peeks at me, lips curved wickedly. “I think he likes you.”

My spine stiffens. “What makes you say that??”

“Girlfriend, he ripped Ash off you last night like a wild beast protecting his territory from an intruder.”

“Yea…” I sigh, rubbing my face. “I was afraid that was how it looked…”

When I glance up, Zeb is gawking at me. “You’ve already hooked up with him, haven’t you?”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” I huff, avoiding a lie by not actually answering the question.

Frankie wanders into the room with a bottle of Prosecco, and Zeb points at her accusingly. “And you *knew*, didn’t you?!”

Her forehead lines. “What the hell are you talking about?”

“It’s elementary, my dear Watson.” Zeb starts prancing around in front of us like he’s cracked the case. “Micah told me he saw Kyran leaving your bedroom the night of your Halloween party, after which he high-tailed it out of the party. Just like someone who just had their first gay experience would.”

I chuckle and shake my head.

“And the only other people in the room were you two,” he goes on, spinning to face us, pinning Frankie with a look. “Which means, *you* must have gotten a front-row seat to watch the two of them do a li’l rub-n-tug.”

“You’re the biggest fool on the planet,” Frankie scoffs.

“I’m not done.” He aims that devious grin at me. “I also happen to remember another time Kyran slunk out of a room all flush-faced… The bathroom at Theo’s party. And who should exit said bathroom only moments later, grinning like he just got himself some secret quarterback dick?” He swoops a hand in my direction. “Our own little Avi Vega.”

Narrowing my gaze at him, I force myself not to react. “Can we not do this right now? I have no interest in your half-cocked theories.”

“Oh, but they’re not half-cocked at all, are they, princess?” he sneers. “They’re fully *cocked*.” He steps in front of me and bends to make eye contact. “All of this has been going on right under our noses the whole time. So only one question remains…” I roll my eyes again, chuckling at how extra he is. “Who is *really* co-starring in all those videos with you? Someone who started out just a little curious, but turned into a beautiful, big-dicked *fiend* for our darling **Backwardz_Cap**.”

Pursing my lips, I start the slow clap, to which his grin widens. “Great job, Sherlock.” Then I squint up at him and murmur, “Prove it.”

“I won’t stop until I do, you bisexual mastermind.”

I toss my head back in laughter that feels really good right now. All the stress lately has been weighing on me… Things with me and Kyran, constantly second-guessing myself, school, and money, and the fans.

I forgot how good it feels to just laugh with my crazy friends.

“Okay, if we’re done playing detective,” Frankie mutters, popping the bottle and pouring us each a glass. “We need to get ready.”

“Guys, I don’t even know if I’ll be able to get in,” I interject. “If the dean is there, she’ll tell them to bounce my ass, since I’m suspended and all.”

“Trust me, dear,” Zeb says, sipping his drink while fussing with my hair. “I wouldn’t get you all dolled up for nothing. We’re gonna sneak you in.”

He peeks at Frankie, and she smirks.

I force a weak smile, but I’m not exactly confident in this plan.

From an eagle suit to glass slippers… Fairy Godmother, take the wheel.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Variable_vers: The way Backwardz_Cap looks at Not_Your_Baby… my heart can't cope <3
Gary425: Couple goals

Kyran

This team banquet is huge, *and* extravagant.

It's being held in one of the convention rooms in the stadium, and the whole place is decked out with lights and opulent decor. Tables are draped in white cloths, with red rose centerpieces sprayed with gold glitter to reflect the BC colors. There's a dance floor, and a stage set up where the band will play a few songs. Outside of that, a DJ is currently spinning soft music while people file in, dressed in their fanciest attire.

My teammates, staff, some faculty and family members are all here to celebrate the Eagles's achievements this season. And give us one final night of praise before we leave for California.

A send-off party, before the most important game we've ever played.

My dad and Hannah texted that they'll be here soon. I'm wearing my best Tom Ford suit. My hair is perfectly slicked back the way it needs to be, and there's a small smile resting on my lips for each and every person who comes up to shake my hand, congratulating me on an incredible season. To wish me luck… *not that you need it.*

That's what they all say. And I appreciate it, their votes of confidence. I certainly don't intend on losing the Rose Bowl, but truthfully, the game is only the second thing on my mind right now.

The first still hasn't shown up.

Caterers walk around with cocktails and hors d'oeuvres, and I manage to sneak an Old Fashioned to calm my nerves. Coach is looking the other way tonight about us drinking. As long as we don't get sloppy and embarrass him, he doesn't care.

And honestly, I sort of need it right now. Every time a new person walks through the double-doors, my heart hurdles up into my throat.

Calm down. He'll be here… I'm sure he will.

I've just finished chatting with our assistant coach and his wife when Guty strides over, looking very *cartel capo* in his white suit.

"Yo, did you hear??" he whispers, and my brows knit.

"Hear what?"

He ushers me off to the side, away from anyone who could overhear us. "Avi got suspended."

Every muscle in my body goes stiff. "*What?!*"

"Yea… I guess he started an OnlyFans, and somehow the dean found out."

I'm sure I've never been paler. I'm just gawking at him with bulging eyes while my entire life flashes before them.

"If she can prove it was definitely him, and he was doing it on campus, he's gonna get expelled." Guty shakes his head.

"R-really…?" It feels like I'm swallowing a mouthful of gravel. I can't even move. I'm racked with so much fear and unease, my feet are weighted to the floor. "How… Who… Who ratted on him??"

"Get this." Guty's eyes flick. "Ash Holloway… is Dean Perkins's *nephew*."

My fist curls at my side. "Are you fucking serious??"

He nods. "Yea, bro. I guarantee he has something to do with this."

"But why would he fuck Avi over??" I shake my head. "It makes no sense."

Guty shrugs. "I don't know, maybe he's butthurt that Avi rejected him or something."

"But they were… kissing last night." I gulp over the way the words feel like bile rising in my throat.

"Yea, until you pulled him off." He grins. "Don't be surprised if he's gunning for your ass now too, Nueve."

This is fucking insane.

I can't even process it.

Avi is suspended. The dean knows about the OnlyFans. Ash Holloway is a prick of epic proportions…

What if he knows I was the one in those videos with Avi?? What if he tells the dean??

Theo stomps over to us, interrupting my inner meltdown. “Bro, *everyone’s* talking about your stepbrother.” He chuckles in fascination. “He’s like this OnlyFans superstar. I didn’t even know he was gay…”

“He’s bi,” I grumble, then purse my lips. “I guess. I mean, that’s what he told me…”

“Did you know about the stuff he was doing?” Theo asks, excitedly. He seems thrilled by all this, and I can’t tell if he just loves the drama or if he actually thinks it’s awesome that Avi’s been fucking dudes online for money.

Not dudes. *Just one dude… Me.*

God, this is fucked.

“Excuse me…” Ignoring him, I spin away and pull my phone from my pocket, typing out a fast text.

Me: Where are you? Are you coming?? I need to see you…

Only a minute goes by before he responds.

Avi: I’m outside…

Avi: I saw Dean Perkins go in and I don’t want her to see me

Me: What the fuck is going on?? You’re suspended?????

Avi: Don’t worry. I’m handling it.

Me: How? How the hell are you going to handle this, Avi?? Everyone knows

He doesn’t respond, and my heart is jumping frantically inside my chest.

Stalking toward the door, I’m all set to sneak outside to go find him. But I bump into my father and stepmother instead.

“Son!” My dad smiles wide, grabbing my shoulder. “Great to see you.”

I’m distracted from giving him a bewildered look when Hannah pulls me in for a tight hug. “This is so exciting, Kyran! The Rose Bowl, my God…” She releases me, holding me at arm’s length and grinning. “I can’t believe my stepson is a famous football star!”

“I’m hardly *famous*…” I rub the back of my neck. “Hey, did you see—”

My words are cut off when I spot Frankie and Zeb slinking past us into the room, their bodies huddled together to form a shield in front of my stepbrother, who’s crouched and shuffling in behind them.

“Avi,” I whisper, leaving Dad and Hannah to follow them.

“Shhh!” Zeb gasps at me. “We’re trying to sneak him past the dean.”

“It doesn’t matter,” I grunt, my eyes stuck on Avi while he hides behind his friends. “Everyone is talking about him. He won’t be in here for two seconds before someone spots him and makes a scene.”

Avi’s gaze flits up to mine and he blinks. There’s so much in that one look, it’s like an entire conversation. One I’m dying to have with him. But now I *can’t*, because there’s too much heat…

I just wanted to see him, but not like this. Not with all these prying eyes watching our every move. It’s too much pressure.

“Members of the band are required backstage to set up!” someone yelps at Frankie and Zeb, grabbing them and ushering them away.

“Goddamnit…” Zeb huffs, following the guy while shooting Avi an apologetic look.

“Good luck, bae.” Frankie shrugs as they’re whisked off.

And now Avi is just standing out in the open, his head sloping left and right as people immediately begin to notice him.

My nervous gaze slides over his frame, and for a second, I completely forget about all the bullshit going on… Because he looks *incredible*.

He’s wearing a three-piece suit, and a very dapper one, I might add. Slim, black, and sort of shimmery, with a gray dress shirt underneath and a vest. His tie is skinny and hot pink, because this is Avi we’re talking about… He’s also wearing Chucks, not dress shoes, and his nails are painted black, hair mussed up in his signature look that fits him so well.

He looks every bit like the emo kid forced to put on a suit, and *God*, it’s really working for him. I can picture him on stage singing some My Chemical Romance song I’m sure he knows all the words to.

My lips part, because I want to tell him all these things… Or even just say *hi*, because I haven’t stopped thinking about him for one second since last night.

With the craziest wave of need crashing over me, I’m reaching out like I want to hold his hand. I’ve completely forgotten that we’re surrounded by people and drama and impending doom.

I’m just staring at him, and he’s staring at me like he wants the same thing I do…

To dance with me.

I just want to slow dance with him… Because he never got to in high school.

Of all the firsts we've had together, it feels like one I'm desperate to have with him.

But it doesn't happen that way. Because reality comes bursting through our bubble as the hushed murmurs of my teammates, cheerleaders, and onlookers attack my ears.

"He's the one… with the OnlyFans," someone whispers.

"That's **Backwardz_Cap**!" another person quietly exclaims.

"I heard he did it all on campus…" The words are surrounding us, just like the group that's now forming.

"But who's **Not_Your_Baby**??"

I'm quaking from head to toe, my gut clenching up like a fist.

It's all over… I can feel it.

This will be the end of everything.

"Avi, my darling boy!" Hannah strides over in her black dress, hugging her son, fully unaware that we're standing in the eye of the storm.

"Looking sharp." My father grins and slaps him on the back.

"Oh, boy…" Avi rubs the back of his neck, his eyes pinging between our parents and the rest of the party, most of whom are staring at him. "I was really hoping you guys wouldn't be here for this…"

Hannah's forehead lines in concern. "Here for what?"

"Mr. Vega." Dean Perkins saunters over, folding her arms over her chest. "I'm sorry to have to do this, but being suspended means you're prohibited from attending school functions."

"Suspended?!" Hannah gasps.

"Avi, what is she talking about?" my dad barks.

Avi glances at me. My mouth is still hanging open, but I have absolutely no idea what to say. I don't even think I could form words right now if I tried.

"Dean, what's going on?" Coach Matthews stomps over.

"Avi's been suspended," she whispers to him. "He shouldn't be here."

"I don't think that's necessary," Coach says. "Avi's a member of our team. Just let him stay for the banquet."

"I'm afraid I can't allow that." She stands her ground. "Not with allegations like these…"

"What allegations??" my father hisses.

“Avi, what’s going on?” Hannah takes Avi by the arm, her face dripping with unease.

“Mom, let’s go outside and talk,” Avi murmurs, then looks to Coach and the dean. “Thanks, Coach, but it’s alright. I’ll leave.”

“Don’t make him leave!” Guty shouts out.

“Let the pornstar stay!” someone else hollers.

The crowd erupts in gasps and some laughter.

Avi’s eyes have never been wider, but he honestly doesn’t look mortified.

But I am.

I’m fucking *shaking* right now. This is all too close for comfort.

How do these people know everything?? Is it all because of Ash fucking Holloway?

And if so, that asshole better watch his back.

“Did they just say *pornstar*??” Hannah croaks, yanking Avi hard by the arm until he stumbles. “Why are they calling you a pornstar, Aviel?!”

Avi actually chuckles, fingers digging into his eyes as he shakes his head like he just doesn’t know what to say or do.

“This is not the time or place for any of this,” Dean Perkins grumbles, motioning toward the door. “Why don’t we all step outside…”

“Avi, where’s **Not_Your_Baby**?!” someone shouts out from the crowd. “We wanna know!”

I’m gnawing on my bottom lip so hard, I taste blood.

“Alright, that’s enough,” Avi grunts, running his hands through his hair. “Dean Perkins, I admit it, *okay??* It was me. I made the OnlyFans and I did it on school property.”

A bunch of people gasp, and a few actually cheer.

“Avi… Don’t,” I whisper to him with fear and guilt weaving through my chest.

I don’t want him to take the fall for all of this. He shouldn’t have to suffer the consequences alone when we’re both responsible.

But he just peeks at me and murmurs, “It’s okay. I’ve got this. It’s fine.” He clears his throat, returning to the dean. “It was my account.”

Dean Perkins’s jaw tightens visibly. “And the… other parties?”

“Just random human beings,” he says firmly. “Not students of this school. And all well over the age of consent, which is seventeen in Massachusetts.” He smirks.

“You realize you’ll be expelled…” Dean Perkins says, tilting her head. “Permanently.”

Avi nods. “That’s fine. Because I don’t regret it.” His eyes shift to mine, and he whispers, “Best thing I’ve ever done.”

My heart thumps, a warm heat enveloping my heart while I just stand still and stare at him.

I can’t believe he’s doing this for me.

He’s getting himself expelled… Taking all this heat. *For me.*

“What the hell is going on here??” my father barks.

“Avi… what did you do?” Hannah scolds quietly.

“Alright, Mr. Vega…” the dean sighs, ushering him out of the room. “Let’s go.”

And the strangest thing happens. People start *cheering*.

As Avi is walked out of the banquet, theoretically dejected and disgraced for what he’s done, the entire team, the cheerleaders, fellow students, everyone is clapping and whistling for our resident pornstar.

The faculty and staff all look beyond baffled by what’s going on. And Avi is just grinning, his usual blasé attitude intact as he waves goodbye. Before Hannah smacks him on the arm.

I’m about to follow them. *Because I’m part of the family, so it’s not unreasonable for me to go after him in this case… Right?*

But I’m stopped by people swarming me. My teammates and other students, all berating me with questions about my stepbrother.

“Did you know??”

“Have you seen his videos??”

“Will he bring back the account?”

“Have you met **Not_Your_Baby**??”

“Is that his real-life boyfriend??”

I’m fucking *shocked* at how many of them actually know about this. There’s no way this is all a result of Ash Holloway’s flapping lips.

They seem like… *fans*.

Fans of **Backwardz_Cap** and **Not_Your_Baby**.

And for the first time since we took down the account, I actually regret it.

It turns out Avi was right all along. These people aren’t just in it for the sex. They’re fans of us as a *couple*.

And I think I can definitely relate.

“Alright, alright.” Coach bursts into the swarm around me, forcing everyone to disperse. “I never thought I’d have to say this at a football banquet, but that’s enough talk of porn for one evening,” he scoffs, shaking his head. “Let’s get back to the *football*, please, people.”

Everyone wanders off, whispering amongst themselves. Guty and Theo stay by my side, until Coach shoots Theo a look that has him following the man.

My eyes linger on him for a moment, before Guty distracts me by shaking my shoulders. “Dude, your stepbrother is loco, and I’m living for it!”

I have to chuckle while we walk over to get more drinks, my gaze flitting back to the doors. “I didn’t know you were so into gay OnlyFans…”

“Hey, I didn’t subscribe or anything.” He grins. “You know who I think did, though…?”

I peer at him. “Who??”

He nods in Theo’s direction. Looking back over to Theo, I watch as he stands next to Coach, the two of them sharing some sort of hushed conversation. Then Coach’s wife walks over, pulling his attention to her while Theo shifts on his feet, lingering and gulping back a drink.

Why would Theo watch Avi’s videos…?

It’s interesting, and I’m thinking about what I’m seeing for a moment, but more than anything, my eyes won’t stop returning to the door. Hoping like hell Avi will come back in here, even though I know he won’t.

The band sets up to play, and food is being passed around, but I’m not interested in any of it. I just want to go find Avi.

I still need to talk to him. *I can’t let it end like this…*

With him taking the blame and just leaving, *thinking I don’t… Without knowing that I…*

Huffing out of stress and nerves and some tingling thrill, I hold my phone down on my lap, and type out a text to him.

Me: Please tell me you didn’t leave…

Minutes go by, but *finally* he responds.

Avi: Just talking my mom off a ledge

I chuckle.

Me: I need to see you again…

Me: We didn’t get to talk

Avi: I know. Maybe you can come by Frankie's after?

Shaking my head, I chew on my lip while my mind runs. I can't let him go.

Not this time… *All dressed up and in need of a dance.*

I look around the room. Everyone is paying attention to the food, and to Coach as he strides up onto the stage.

They might not even notice if I slipped away…

"I want to thank you all for being here tonight," Coach speaks into the microphone, and I type out a final text. "This is a monumental moment for our team. And I just have to say how proud I am of these guys."

Me: Meet me in the back by the locker rooms in ten minutes

"Making it this far takes guts. Talent and determination, yes," Coach goes on. "But most of all, it takes endurance. You boys have displayed more strength, teamwork, and tenacity than any team I've ever had the pleasure of coaching."

We all gaze up at the stage, at our coach commending us with his powerful words.

"And I know you're not done yet. Not even close." He grins and lifts his glass. "So let's all raise a glass… To the BC Eagles, and *our* championship."

Everyone shouts *here here!* And we drink, bursts of applause ringing out through the room. I peek at Guty, who's looking up at the stage, and Theo, who's draining his glass.

I love playing alongside these guys; my *friends*. I love the game and I love being able to win for them.

But right now, football is still second in my mind.

I need to go find who's first.

Avi

What a freaking shitshow, man.

I finally managed to calm my mother and Tom down enough to get them to go back inside and get something to eat. That was a challenge.

Mom is pissed, understandably. I mean, I'm expelled from a respectable college for making porn. *Not exactly every mother's dream for her son.*

But I just told her the truth… I don't really care about school.

I never have. I've never been a good student, or enjoyed learning about things that don't interest me. And that doesn't mean I'm uneducated. It just means my interests lie in other things. But more importantly, I just don't feel like I fit in here, which really leads me to reflect on why exactly I thought BC was a good idea in the first place.

Of course Tom didn't get it, but whatever. It's not really his place to, especially now that I'm paying for my own education.

And that was the other part that almost gave my mother a coronary…

The *Fans*.

Thankfully, they don't know the details of the account, because I'm not totally comfortable coming out to my mother in front of Tom. He's, like… *so* Catholic. I'd rather tell my mom that I'm bisexual when it's just the two of us, saving my stepdad's *man shall not lie with another man* speech for another time. Or never.

So I just told them that it was only one person, which is true, sparing any gender questions. And that we were safe, and everything is fine.

And then I shooed them away, insisting that they were going to miss the food, and Frankie and Zeb playing music, and that I'm *fine* and I'll talk to them later. It was a minor miracle that they agreed to leave it for now, and I think a lot of it had to do with them wanting to support Kyran, because it's a big night for him.

But I guess Kyran doesn't care all that much about his *big night*…

Because he just texted me to meet him alone.

Waiting until the coast is clear, I stealthily creep back into the building through the entrance by the locker rooms. I follow the long hall, peeking into rooms here and there to see if I can find Kyran. I figured he might be in the locker room, where we kissed that time while I was in my Baldwin suit… But he's not there. Still, the memory brings a flutter to my belly, remembering how much he used to push me away, and how much I'm fucking pleading with any force that will listen that maybe he's done doing that.

The further in I get, the louder the music becomes, and at this point, I think I'm pretty much right on the other side of a dividing wall between the banquet and the rest of the convention area. Stepping up to a set of double-doors, I push one open and my jaw drops.

It's just a big, open space; a room used to keep sports equipment and whatnot. But there are lights strung up around the outer edges, draped over furniture, giving the space a dull glow to make up for the lack of overhead lighting.

Wandering inside the dimly lit room, I'm spinning around, searching for Kyran while marveling at whatever the heck this is. I hear something rustling, and I turn to find him walking over from a corner, a soft smile on his lips and something in his hand.

"Hey…" My voice comes out sort of breathy, and his grin widens.

"Hi." He reaches me, but doesn't stop until he's in my space and he's taking my hand. "I made you something."

My mouth curves while I gape at him, restless nerves bouncing inside me as he fastens something to my jacket. I squint at it, forehead lined in perplexity.

"Is that a… flower?" I mumble, and he laughs softly.

"I made you a boutonniere out of a napkin," Kyran says, almost timidly. Then he hands me another one. "This one's mine." I'm just gawking at him, totally stunned, as he whispers, "You have to pin it on me, baby."

My lashes flutter for another few seconds before I snap into movement and do it, pinning a rumpled little napkin flower to his jacket while I ask, "What… What is this?"

He leans in close to my ear, squeezing my shivering hand in his. "Thank you for coming to prom with me, Avi."

I think I might literally be falling down if he wasn't standing close enough to hold me up. *He's… asking me to prom? My first prom…*

He made a prom for me??

"You did this…?" I glance around at the lights.

"I know… pretty corny," he huffs.

"Uh-uh." I shake my head firmly, and he peeks at me. "It's fucking *perfect*, Kyran."

His hazel eyes twinkle like the lights around us, smile beaming with elation. He tugs my hand to rest on his chest, sealing our bodies together while his other hand rests on my lower back.

And he hums, “Dance with me.”

The band is playing some song I vaguely recognize on the other side of the wall; a slow song that reminds me of people dancing beneath the moonlight in the movies.

Without even thinking, I’m holding his chest while he holds my waist, and starts to move.

But I’m still stiff, because I have no idea what I’m doing. “Ky… I don’t slow dance. I’ve never done it before…”

“I know.” He chuckles. “I don’t care. I just wanna be close to you.”

My fucking heart.… It’s floating weightlessly inside me like a balloon as I lean into him, resting my body on his strength and his size. My face tucks into the crook of his neck so he doesn’t see how badly I’m blushing like a lovestruck fool.

My first slow dance… My own *prom*… With the quarterback of the football team as my date.

Jeez, I’m like every nerdy girl in every high school movie right now.

But I love it. I don’t even care, I’m in fucking *love* with it, because I’m in love with *him*, and *fuck*, I can’t believe I ever thought I could stop it from happening.

Kyran moves us slowly to the music, barely stepping, more like rocking us together, his fingers trailing up and down my back.

“You look so gorgeous…” he whispers in between sniffing me, and I can’t stop smiling. “When I saw you tonight, my heart stopped.”

“Okay, you’re *killing* me with all this,” I rumble, and he chuckles. “I’m serious. Who are you, and what have you done with my grouchy stepbrother??”

A hum vibrates from his chest into mine. Then he pulls back to look at me. “Be serious with me, Avi.”

“I am…” I rasp. “I mean, I’m *shocked*. Surprised and… blown away that you did this for me. I just wasn’t expecting it, I guess.” I pause to gulp, and contemplate if I really want to say this. “I never know what to expect from you, Kyran.”

“I know…” he murmurs, regretfully. “And I’m *sorry*. About everything…”

“You don’t need to be sorry,” I tell him honestly. “I get it.”

“No. I do, and I am,” he says firmly. “I’m sorry for making it about me with the Fans. I’m sorry for not coming over to talk to you when it was

killing me not to. I'm sorry for acting like an asshole last night, and I'm *so* fucking sorry you got expelled trying to protect me. I didn't want that. And I barely even care about my reputation if it means you have to leave…"

"Ky, stop." I brush my fingers through his hair. "I don't care about being expelled." He cocks an eyebrow, and I chuckle softly. "I mean it. I *don't*. I don't need to go to this school to do what I want to do. And honestly…" My voice trails, and I bite my lip. "Jesus, this is gonna make me sound so pathetic, but… the only reason I'm here in the first place is… because of you."

The look on his face is twisting me up. I can't tell if he's stunned by what I'm saying because I am, in fact, that obsessive stalker he accused me of being for following him to BC… Or if this revelation is making him *happy*.

"Avi…" he whimpers, stopping his swaying to stare at me as his fingers dig into my back. "Tell me what you're saying…"

"I'm saying…" I breathe a sigh of confession, "It was never for the money, or for BC… Or for the fans. It was for *you*, Kyran. For fucking *you*, and that's it. Every single thing I did… I did for you. To *have* you."

He swallows, eyes rounded and shining nervous delight.

"Maybe I didn't know it at first…" I keep going. "But the truth is that it could have been anyone in those videos with me. But I wanted you. I think I have for a long time… I didn't understand it, but you hating me just made me want to chase you. And then you started coming to *me*. And you're just the best, most unexpected thing that's ever showed up at my door."

Kyran's lips shiver on an anxious exhale. "I don't think I can fight it anymore, Avi…"

My breathing shallows. "Fight what?"

"Us…" The gold and green in eyes glow, offering me a timid sparkle. "Baby, I think I'm in love with you," he whispers on my lips, dropping his forehead to mine, clutching onto my body for dear life. Like he's afraid if he lets go for one second, I'll float away.

I'm trembling all over, crumbling from his words, and his feel, and the endless aching emotion he's giving me.

The hot grouchy blonde, whose hate for me, this whole time, was just an unavoidable chemistry.

I can't help it… I'm tripping up, my mouth quivering on his and my hands just touching him everywhere I can reach.

Until he growls, “Say it back, Avi. Don’t be a jerk.”

I laugh, and he grins, brushing his lips with mine. “Just let me revel in this a little more…”

“Fuck off,” he hisses, teasing, though I think a part of him might be scared that I don’t…

As if there’s any fucking way I couldn’t.

“I’m in love with you,” I murmur, and his body shudders in my hands. “And I’m pretty sure I have been since the moment we met.”

He lets out a soft sound, like relief, and joy, fear and excitement all in one perfect little sigh. “But I was so mean to you…” His voice shakes. It’s the sexiest thing I’ve ever heard.

I nod. “I know… I might be a masochist.”

He laughs, and I’m standing at the edge of something terrifyingly beautiful.

“Tell me the truth…” I rasp, and his head tilts. “Did you come in your pants that night at Frankie’s because of me?”

He growls a stubborn noise, fingers sliding up my neck into my hair. But then he nods, and bites his lip. “I thought you were gonna kiss me…”

My foot slips off. And I plummet.

“I fucking knew I should have, baby,” I hum, fisting his jacket lapels and pulling his mouth to mine. *I’ll never make that mistake again.*

The music plays while we dance, and kiss, and breathe together…

Falling into love, with wind rushing and windows all around us.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

simsimma: Backwardz_Cap giving his baby snuggles to turn him less grumpy is all I want to see for the rest of my life
steph_be_simpin: what's happening to my knees *kneeling emoji*

Kyran

This morning, when I wake up, *everything* is different.

It's not the first time I've woken up thinking about Avi… Not by a long shot. But it's the first time I haven't immediately pushed it down; stuffed it away into the back of my mind like old clutter.

It's the first time having him in my brain right when I open my eyes has brought a smile to my lips and warmth to every inch of my flesh.

It's the first time I've admitted inside my own head that I wish he were here right now.

My thoughts are *overflowing* with images of last night, feelings and sensations.

His lips dancing down my throat while he whispered, "I love you, Kyran."

My fingers twisting in his hair while I purred, "I love you, Avi…"

The urgency that seemed to ding between us like a timer as we snuck off into a dark corner of the room and he fell to his knees.

I'm biting my lip, writhing in bed, *remembering* it…

Him opening my pants and stuffing my cock impatiently between his lips.

"I fucking *missed* you…" I told him through gasps, trying my hardest to be quiet while he sucked my cock slowly and hungrily, touching me everywhere his hands could reach. "God, I missed you so bad, baby…"

We were ravenous in the way we were pawing at each other, panting and grunting and knocking things over. Knowing someone could find us at any moment didn't subdue my arousal one bit. As it does, it just made it that much *hotter*.

My fingers are trailing over my sensitive skin while I remember spilling into his mouth, and him swallowing me back with desperate gulps. Then he stood up and kissed me, feeding me his tongue coated in my own flavor while I shoved my hand inside his pants.

"I wish we could fuck right now," I whimpered as he spun me around to grind his length against my ass through our designer suits.

"It's probably good that we can't," he breathed hoarsely, sounding so fucking sexy I'm going out of my mind right now hearing it in my head. "I don't want to rush, baby. And I don't want to be quiet. I want to spend all night with my cock in you, making you scream how much you love me."

"I *do* love you." I pushed back against him, bumping him into even more furniture as I turned back around, dropping to my knees to kiss the shape of his big dick through his tailored pants. "So much…"

I'm whining for him now, my cock full and achy at the memories of him gazing down at me, eyes glistening in the dark, his long fingers sifting through my hair.

"Fuck my mouth until you come in me," I pleaded up at him from the floor.

And he did. *Oh God, he did.*

It was so sexy, him fucking my throat up against the wall, his hand cupping the back of my head to keep it from bashing into the plaster. It was only a matter of minutes before he was writhing into my face, growling that he was…

"Gonna come… oh fuck, Kyran, baby, I'm coming."

Reaching down to my cock, I palm it a few times, slipping my hand inside my sweatpants to stroke it slowly at all these illicit memories.

I should have just gone to see him at Frankie's last night…

We could be waking up and doing this together, instead of me missing him like a phantom limb in my bed.

My phone pings, and I peek at it where it's resting next to me.

Avi: Are you as hard as I am right now?

A crazed grin sweeps over my lips, and I start typing out a response. But then I delete it and call him instead.

He picks up on the first ring. “How did I know you were awake and probably fondling yourself…”

I chuckle, then groan, rolling onto my stomach with a pout. “I miss you…”

“I know. I miss you too… Like crazy.”

“Can I see you today? Before I leave?” My tone is downright pleading and I don’t even care.

“Baby, I think I’m leaving before you,” he huffs.

I’m pouting, but excitement still fizzles in my gut.

Avi’s coming to California for the Rose Bowl. But not as part of the team… He’s coming for *me*. He told me last night that he bought his ticket months ago.

“I wouldn’t miss it for the world, superstar,” he said while we kissed over and over, slowly attempting to detach from one another so I could go back to the banquet before people started freaking out.

“Will you be okay with not… telling people about us until after?” I mumbled, feeling like a total chicken-shit loser for even suggesting we keep hiding it. “I just wanna focus on the game. I don’t want everyone spazzing and ruining my concentration.”

But Avi just grinned, that comforting, calming smile I used to hate because of how good it makes him look. “I can’t believe you’re even talking about telling people.” He shook his head while he straightened my tie. “I’m in no rush for anything, baby. I just wanna be with you. Nothing else matters.”

Biting my lip, I ask him, “What time is your flight?”

“Six. You?”

“Seven-thirty.” I frown. “We’re gonna just miss each other.”

“That’s okay,” he hums easily. “I’ve gotta go move the rest of my stuff out of the dorm and into Frankie’s, anyway.”

“Right… Well, when you see that asshole Ash Holloway, make sure to punch him in the face for me.”

Avi chuckles. “We don’t know it was him who told the dean…”

“Uh, yes, we do. He’s her fucking nephew… Plus, he’s clearly in love with you.”

“Then why would he want to get me kicked out of the dorm we live in together?” I can hear the grin in his voice.

“Because he sucks, and he’s jealous.”

“Because he knows I belong to someone else…?” he whispers, and my balls throb. “The person who christened that dorm room with me…”

My lips curl into a smirk, remembering all the good times we had in TMA room 446. It’s a shame he has to move out. But I’m sure we can christen all kinds of different places… *Now that we’re stupidly in love.*

“I don’t want to think about him anymore.” I flop onto my back. “Or the fact that you’re expelled.”

“You’re right,” he hums firmly. “No more stress. Let’s think about good things.”

“You’re finally going to meet Bridget…” I murmur, worrying my bottom lip.

No stress… Pfft. I know of no such concept.

“I can’t wait,” he croons.

“Avi…” I whisper, choking up a bit because this is all still new and confusing for me, despite how fucking incredible it feels. “My head is spinning, baby. Is this real? Tell me I’m not dreaming…”

He chuckles, a growly, sexy laugh that throbs my balls. “I think I’m the one who should be asking you that… ’Cause this has been real for me for a while. No offense, but I’ve been waiting for you to catch up.”

I swallow hard. “I know… I’m sorry I was pushing you away for so long.”

“You’re worth the wait, gorgeous,” he sighs. “And it hasn’t been that long. We’ve only been doing this for a few months.”

“Maybe it feels longer… because I liked you when I thought I hated you.”

“That’s what I was waiting for,” he hums. I can hear the grin in his voice, and it makes me laugh.

“Avi, I don’t know how to do this…” I confess my insecurities to him. And to be honest, it feels fucking great. *He’s just so easy to talk to… You’d think telling him everything would be a piece of cake.* “I’m kinda scared.”

“You have every right to be,” he murmurs supportively. “I told you last night, Kyran… No one has to know anything until you’re ready. I don’t care, I just want you.”

I’m nodding like he can see me… But in my gut, I feel like it’s not right. He deserves someone who’s strong enough to kiss him in front of the world. He deserves surety, certainty.

No doubts… And I seem to be full of them.

But not about him… About *myself*.

"Ky, I don't do relationships either," he breathes into the phone. "You know that. I've never done this before, with anyone. And you've never done it with a guy. So the way I see it, we're going through this together. Again."

My lips curl. "So you're saying… I'm your first?"

He laughs, shivering my insides with how damn good it sounds. "Yes, baby. You're my first. And I'm yours."

I'm getting all squirmy again as I purr, "I'm *so* yours…"

The sound of Guty stomping back inside the dorm pulls Cupid's arrow out of my ass, and I shoot up in bed, tugging the comforter over my waist.

"Yo, Nueve! Up and at 'em, baby boy!" Guty shouts at me from the living room. "It's gym time! Then we gotta wrap that arm…"

"Was he in the room the whole time??" Avi mumbles.

"No, he just got back," I whisper, sitting still for a moment, waiting for my dick to deflate so I can get up. But it's not really getting the message. I blame Avi and his sexy morning voice. "I gotta go… Just being on the phone with you is making me hard, and I need not to be."

He chuckles wickedly. "You better figure out a way to see me tonight. I don't think I'll be able to last until after the game…"

"Trust me, I need your dick just as bad." I peer at the door to make sure Guty isn't within earshot. "It's my good luck charm."

"Well then… I'll be ready and waiting in California. At your service, superstar," he croons.

"I'll call you when I land," I hum, finally sliding out of bed. "You should come have dinner with Bridget and me."

"Nothing would make me happier."

"'Kay…" I bite my lip, because I really don't want to hang up, and it's fucking ludicrous.

"Say it first, Kyran," he whispers in my ear.

I roll my eyes, but my smile is seriously bordering on psychotic. "I love you, Avi."

"Mmm… I love you, HGB."

"You're an annoying idiot." I bite the grin off my lips, and he laughs.

"That's my man."

Hanging up the phone, my head is freaking twirling off my body like the Tasmanian Devil. I can barely process the revelation of the past forty-

eight hours…

After everything Avi and I have been through, *finally* admitting that the hate was never really hate, and that the fear was covering up love… it threw me completely off kilter. It's absolutely insane the way it just smacked me in the face. But as soon as it did, it was like a blindfold had been lifted from my eyes.

I can see it all so clearly now.

I'm gay, and I'm in love with my stepbrother.

There it is.

Wow… This must be what really great drugs feel like.

"What the hell are you smiling about in here, man??" Guty staggers past me into the room, going for his gym bag. "We're burning daylight!"

"Sorry," I grunt, forcing myself to sound normal, and not like someone who's totally in love with his stepbrother.

Getting dressed in my workout gear, I follow Guty to the gym, looking to burn off some of this excess energy before we board our flight to Cali.

Tomorrow will be a huge day… Biggest game of my life.

And for the first time ever, it really feels like I have someone to *win* for.

By the time I'm settled in the hotel in Pasadena, the high from earlier has worn off a little, and I'm fucking annoyed about it.

I don't want to be feeling all nervous and bunched up and uneasy, but I can't help it. On top of *everything else* that's happening right now, I'm seeing my sister for the first time in six years, and it's fucking me up a lot.

Of course I miss her like crazy. Bridget and I were super close before she left… Especially when we were little. Sure, I was her annoying little brother, and she was my mean big sister who used to dress me up in her clothes and put makeup on me. But that's just your standard sibling stuff, really.

Outside of that, she was my protector. My best friend. When it was clear that our parents were too involved in themselves, Dad with his work and Mom with her country club friends, Bridget looked after me. We used to

play together every day after school, until she became a teenager and her friends took priority over family.

She's never said it to me, but I think she harbors a lot of guilt after what happened. Because she wasn't around to keep me safe.

But it wasn't her fault. *What could she have done, anyway?*

That's kind of why I want to talk to her alone first, before she meets Avi. I want to make sure she knows we don't need to get into all that… stuff. The *past*. Especially with Avi around. I can't have her bringing up things he doesn't know…

Because more than any of the rest of it, I *can't* deal with Avi finding out the truth. It'll change everything.

Unfortunately, my Uber pulls up at the restaurant where we're meeting for dinner at the same time that Avi is hopping out of his. Still, I can't find it in myself to be bummed that I won't get to see Bridget alone… Because Avi's here.

And he looks *perfect*.

He's dressed the way he always is… in ripped black jeans and worn Converse sneakers. A long-sleeved navy button-down hanging open to reveal a tank top underneath with holes in strategic places, allowing me to see little glimpses of olive skin and lines of muscle. His hair is its usual thick, silky mane of tousled strands, so dark brown it almost looks black. And my fingers are immediately wiggling with the desire to comb through it while he kisses me dizzy.

I can still barely believe how easily I'm registering him as *fuckhot*. I used to do everything in my power to stuff thoughts like that down; to keep from noticing him in his every inch of pure masculine, yet somehow *pretty,* perfection. But now they just won't go… Because I don't want them to.

He's *gorgeous*, and when he spots me, the slight curve to his lips eases into a full-blown Avi smile; pearly white teeth, plush pink lips… The works.

And I feel lucky. I feel like the luckiest son of a bitch in the whole world, being the one he smiles at like that.

This is all so new to me… But sneaking out from the shadowed corners of my mind, it feels familiar. Because I think I've felt this way about him for a while, and the only difference is that *now* I'm not running away from it. I'm letting it envelop me, like his big, strong arms do when he wanders

over and wraps me up in a hug that has my entire existence melting into him.

“God, I fucking missed you so much…” he whispers in my ear, decorating my neck in a few secret kisses while his hand cups the back of my head.

My arms lock around his waist and I hold him as close as possible, resting my head against his. *This feeling is such bewildering bliss…*

The muscles in his chest brushing my own, our shared height and strength, and his smell… The whole thing makes me feel drunk. Taking in a deep whiff, I hold it in my lungs, mesmerized by how familiar it is.

Amber, bergamot, sandalwood, and burnt hemp. He smells *exactly* like the candle Bridget sent me for Christmas. The one she used to burn in her bedroom, before she moved away.

The scent that calmed me and comforted me when I was choking and sputtering for air…

Except there’s one difference. Avi also smells like strawberry candy. And it makes the scent a million times better.

“Baby, you’re shaking.” Avi pulls back to lock his foggy blue eyes on mine. “Are you cold?”

I shake my head, forcing the anxiety and dread down with a heavy gulp. “I’m just… I’m so glad you’re here.”

He blinks, the worry on his face retreating into his comfortable little grin. I can tell from the way his eyes keep lingering on my lips that he wants to kiss me. And I *really* want him to…

But we’re out in the open. In *public*.

I’ve never kissed a guy in public before…

“Let’s go in,” he rumbles, releasing me with a slow sweep of his hands off my body, like he doesn’t exactly want to stop touching, but he knows he has to. “I wanna feed you, gorgeous.”

I bite my lip, because that sounds amazing. I’m starving and, for some unknown reason, I love the idea of him wanting to care for me.

It’s fucking insane… I’m a grown man. I don’t need anyone to fawn over me. Yet when Avi does it, it makes me feel so special. Like I’m being cherished by someone who loves me as a man, not just a football player, a student, or an… object.

“I’m… I’m a little nervous,” I say to him, the words coming up on their own, like they’re itching to escape the confines of my mind and take refuge

in him. “It’s been a while since I’ve seen my sister.”

“Well, I’m sure she’s really excited to see you, baby,” he tells me calmly.

I nod as he slips his hand subtly onto my lower back, guiding me inside the restaurant. And all the while, I’m pleading with my subconscious to just give me a break.

Don’t dredge up the past, please. No unwanted memories, no panic attacks.

I don’t want Avi to see me like that.

Inside, Avi gives the hostess my name, which is what our reservation is under, and she alerts us to the fact that Bridget is already here. She walks us into the dining area, and my hands are shaking, reaching out for Avi’s to brush them in a frustratingly unfulfilled moment of contact.

I just want to hold his hand, goddamnit. But I *can’t*. I’m still too scared, and I hate it.

As soon as we’re in view of the back of the restaurant, I spot my sister. She’s seated at a table, typing on her phone, and my chest immediately warms. We don’t talk all that often, an occasional text or phone call here and there, but I keep up with her on social media, just to see what she’s up to. And because of that, I’m not surprised by how different she looks. Although to me, she still resembles the girl I grew up with.

Dirty-blonde hair, maybe a shade or two lighter than mine, and definitely longer than she used to keep it. She has Mom’s nose and chin, but Dad’s dark eyes. Her build is much more athletic than it used to be, because apparently, she runs a lot now.

Our approaching the table must catch her attention because she looks up, eyes locking on me instantly. Her lips sweep into a giant, delighted smile. But still, I can read the emotions on her face like they’re written in twenty-four point font.

“My baby brother…” Bridget whimpers, jumping up from her seat and attacking me, hugging onto me so hard I nearly topple over.

“Hey, Jeff Bridges.” I grin into her hair, squeezing her tight.

She giggles, sniffling like she might be crying. “How’s it going, Cobra Ky?”

I feel her trembling in my arms as she breaks down, gulping with her face in my chest. “I fucking hate how long it’s been… I’m so sorry, Kyran.”

“Stop,” I grunt, my gaze sliding to Avi, who’s smiling at this little scene of reunion, pouting and clutching his hands to his chest. I pull back to lock eyes with my sister, trying my hardest to convey firm sincerity. “No apologies. Everything is fine… I’m just so glad to see you.”

She untangles herself from me, wiping her eyes. “You look great, little bro. Seriously… You’re huge.” She grins, and I chuckle. But then her forehead lines. “Are you doing okay?”

“I’m better than okay,” I reply with certainty, my gaze repeatedly flicking to Avi.

Bridget peers at Avi, as if she’s actually looking at him for the first time, and her eyebrow cocks. “This is our stepbrother?”

I nod while Avi holds his hand out to her, one of his sweet smiles resting on his lips. “Yea. Avi. I’m so pumped to finally meet you…”

They shake hands, and I can see my sister assessing him the way she does. Bridget was never skeptical of people before everything… *happened*. I guess we both used to be pretty trusting and easy-going. But all that changed right before she left Boston, and now I can see it in her eyes. She’s trying to figure Avi out.

It’s gonna take a little more than a handshake to understand this one, sis.

“I’m glad to meet you too,” she says, tilting her head. “I’ve heard a lot about you over the years…” She glances at me. “In fact, it seems like most of our phone calls always end up on Avi-talk.”

I rub the back of my neck while Avi chuckles. “Well, if that’s true, then I’m gonna need to plead my case.” His eyes dart to mine, and I purse my lips to keep from smiling, glancing at my shoes.

“Come on, sit down.” Bridget slides back into her seat. “We’ve got a lot of catching up to do.”

Without even a second thought, Avi and I sit down next to each other, across from Bridget. He scoots in close to me, his thigh pressing against mine. I can feel my cheeks flush, and Bridget narrows her gaze at me.

“I’m really sorry it’s taken this long for us to meet…” Bridget says to Avi, then she looks to me. “You have no idea how many times I wanted to come see you, Ky. But I just… couldn’t do it.”

She lets out an unsteady breath, shaking her head in obvious regret. Watching Avi, I can tell he really wants to ask why she’s refused to come home for so many years…

And the notion that he might twists my stomach up into an unforgiving knot.

“It’s fine,” I mumble, trying my hardest to brush it off. “Everything is fine, seriously. Don’t worry about it…”

“No, Kyran, it’s *not* fine. I’ve been sick over this.” She flips her hair to one side. It brings back so many memories. *Bridget’s a nervous hair-fusser.* “I should’ve come back for you… Just to check on you and make sure you were okay. But Dad is just—”

“Bridget, please,” I bark, softly, but still. It shuts her up quick, and she gazes uneasily at me. I clear my throat. “I’m telling you it’s fine, so just drop it, okay?? I don’t want to talk about Dad, or the past… I have the biggest game of my life tomorrow and I don’t need the stress, alright? So can we just drop it? I want to spend time with you because I miss you.”

I feel Avi staring at the side of my face, but I just know if I look at him, he’ll be able to tell something is up. This is what I was afraid of, coming to this dinner…

Avi’s always been able to read me; to see through my bullshit. It’s how he knew I didn’t really hate him, how he knew exactly what my body wanted when my head just wouldn’t let up.

He’s gonna know… He’ll find out the truth.

And then he won’t want you anymore.

Shaking the thought away, I grab a glass of water on the table, taking a large sip.

“Okay.” Bridget offers me a comforting smile, reaching across the table to squeeze my hand. “I’m sorry. You’re right. Let’s not dwell on anything. I’m just happy to finally be spending time with you again.”

I nod, my lips quirking in a brief smile to let her know it’s alright as my face tilts left. Avi is watching me closely, and when our eyes meet, it feels like hours go by in a split second.

Man, I really just missed being next to him. Isn’t that crazy?? How bizarre that I’m actually allowing myself to feel this way…

Bridget lets go of my hand as the server comes over. “You folks want drinks?”

“None for me.” I smile politely.

“Gotta stay laser-focused, huh?” Avi grins, and I chuckle. He looks to the server. “Water is fine.”

“Water it is,” Bridget sighs. “But you’re definitely eating, right?” She gives me a look, and I laugh.

“Oh, hell yea. I’m starving.”

“Good,” she says. “This place has amazing tapas.”

My sister proceeds to order a bunch of plates for us to share, and while she’s talking to the server, Avi’s fingers slip onto my thigh, dancing up and down until I’m shivering. I don’t think he’s trying to turn me on… I’m pretty sure he’s just being affectionate. But my dick is definitely twitching to life in my pants.

I desperately need to get him inside me tonight before I have to go back to my hotel room. It might have to be quick, but whatever. He can drill a solid orgasm out of me in five minutes that’ll feel like it should’ve taken hours.

“So…” Bridget leans in on the table as the server walks away with our food order. “I take it you two aren’t mortal enemies anymore.” She cocks her head at me, and my spine stiffens. “Since you’re here, hanging out *willingly* and all…”

My lips part and Avi’s do the same as we peek at each other.

I feel like we’re being super awkward just staring at each other, so I mumble, “I guess he’s not that bad…”

Avi bites his lip to keep his smile in check, then turns to Bridget. “I must have worn him down.”

“Hm… Seems like it.” She sits back in her chair, eyes bouncing between us.

She’s obviously suspicious of something, and as anxious as this whole thing is making me, there are words rising up from my throat like they can’t possibly be subdued for one more second.

Stop running. Stop hiding.

Man up.

“When I talked to him on Christmas, he mentioned that you two were getting along better,” Bridget says to Avi, who grins blithely. *As usual.*

“We had a really great holiday.” He tilts his face in my direction, that smile drumming up warmth in my chest.

He deserves this. He deserves something real.

“Did you see Mom at all?” Bridget asks me, and I falter once more.

“No,” I grunt, sidetracked by the mention of my thoroughly unsupportive parents. “I called her, but I just wasn’t in the mood to go over

there and feel like an unwanted burden from her old life…”

Bridget nods, the same forlorn resentment I’m feeling being mirrored back at me in her shiny brown eyes.

Thankfully, she changes the subject with a smirk. “But you liked my gift?”

I grin. “Yea. I love that candle. It’s my favorite scent…” My eyes shift to Avi, who’s giving me a puzzled look.

And the words are on the march, like soldiers charging up a battlefield. My defenses are no use.

They’re going to win.

“It smells like you,” I whisper to him.

His lashes flutter as he chirps, “The candle?” I nod, and his face lights up. “Is that why you like it?”

“Well… Bridget used to always have one like it burning in her room,” I speak quietly, confessing just enough. “It was comforting when other stuff was… going on.” My voice trails and I clear my throat. “And now it’s comforting for another reason. Because it reminds me of you.”

Avi has never looked so thrilled before, and my nerves retreat just enough because I made the right decision. *He’s happy.*

His body turns in his seat, and his eyes fall to my lips, causing me to squirm.

“Kyran…” His tone is soft, but insistent. And I already know what he’s going to say.

“You’re gonna kiss me, aren’t you?” I murmur.

He nods. “I don’t think I can help it…”

Exhilaration sizzles inside me, bringing alive every neuron in my body.

We’re in public. In front of my sister….

But I don’t care. I’m waving the white flag…

I just can’t fight it anymore.

“Then do it.” I slide my hands onto his thigh. “*Please*…”

Without a moment of hesitation, his face slopes down at the same time that his fingers curl around my jaw. And he presses his warm, soft, perfectly unrelenting mouth to mine.

A small gasp breaks from my lips, and he devours it, breathing and parting wider to suck my lips just hard enough that I’m fast dizzy. His fingers glide back into my hair, and he holds me to him, humming as a sweet soundtrack to this romantic display.

It’s over way too quick, even though I get it. Making out in public is gross no matter how newly in love you are. But I can’t help leaning into him, not ready to let him pull away. I’m so desperate for more of those bewitching kisses that I’m actually gripping a fistful of his shirt, and I hadn’t even noticed.

When my eyes peel open, I catch his doing the same, our gazes locked as he puffs out a shivering exhale.

Wow… Who knew kissing a guy in public could feel so… exhilarating.

Avi clears his throat, and his eyes shift across the table, reminding me that we’re not *just* in public, we’re also in front of my *sister*. Who also happens to be Avi’s stepsister.

Because he’s my stepbrother.

Honestly, it’s reminiscent of how we used to forget the camera was recording. *I guess that’s just what happens when the chemistry takes over…*

“Holy fucking shit…” Bridget gasps, startling me when her palms slap down on the table. “I knew it! I *knew* you guys were a thing!”

Moving back in my seat, I squint at her. “You didn’t know shit.”

“I so did!” she squeals. “No offense, but it’s pretty obvious. You’re both smitten.”

“Are not,” I grunt petulantly.

“Yes, you are!” she whispers, her eyes round and sparkly as she beams like she’s overjoyed for us.

I know I’m playing stubborn, because it’s my thing, but I sorta love how excited she is right now.

“*I* am.” Avi shrugs, and when I glare at him, he winks at me, leaning in closer. “I told you, baby… I’m obsessed with you.”

My face must be the color of his damn Twizzlers as I purse my lips.

“Look at him trying to hide it!” Bridget shimmies in her seat. “Baby bro… You’re in love!”

“Stop,” I snap quietly. “Or so help me, I’ll move your seats to the nosebleeds tomorrow.”

She laughs, lunging across the table to take both of our hands. “Oh my goodness gracious, this is so exciting! Stepbrothers falling in love… How scandalous.” She wiggles her eyebrows.

Avi laughs. I roll my eyes.

“Does anyone know?” she asks, practically bouncing.

“Only my best friend,” Avi says.

She nods, then grins deviously at me. “Dad’s gonna flip.”

“Please… I don’t even want to think about him,” I groan, dropping my head into my palm.

“We don’t have to tell anyone anything.” Avi rubs my back. “Not until you’re ready.”

“Aww… he’s so freaking sweet.” Bridget pouts. “He’s perfect for you.”

“Alright, alright. We’re not in Green Bay. Enough with the cheese,” I grumble, and Avi chuckles. “I *do* want to tell people… It just sucks that it’ll turn into this whole thing.”

Bridget’s forehead lines, and Avi clarifies, “Because of the NFL.”

“Ah. Right.” She nods.

“Social media will have a field day.” Avi chews on his lip.

“But I don’t care about that,” I tell him.

“*I* care, Kyran,” Avi says softly, and my head tilts. “I don’t want your reputation to suffer because we’re stepbrothers. Or because of… any of the other stuff now associated with me.”

I’m taken aback. I didn’t know he felt this way. I had no idea he might be guilty about the way our relationship could look to the general public.

“What other stuff is *associated* with you?” Bridget asks, cocking a brow at him.

Avi stiffens and gapes at her.

“Nothing,” I jump in, shooting Avi a look.

“Aw, come on! Tell me!” Bridget whines. “I promise I won’t say anything.”

Avi looks like he really wants to just say it, and I kick him under the table, causing him to grunt.

“Avi, don’t you dare…” I hiss.

He blinks at me and bites his lip. Then he says to Bridget, “I have an OnlyFans.”

“Jesus…” I scoff, rubbing my eyes while Bridget gasps out loud.

“Oh my God! Really?!” Her mouth is hanging open, eyes all wide with fascination. “Like solo content or with… partners?”

Her eyes shift to me.

“I can’t deal with this right now…” I rub my eyes.

“I’ve been working with a… partner.” Avi chooses his words carefully, like he’s on trial for murder. “But currently the account has been… absolved.”

“What does that even mean??” Bridget shakes her head, grinning.

“It means don’t worry about it,” I snap.

Bridget squints at me, and I gulp. *Yea. I was a lot less quick-tempered before she left home too.*

“The point is that it kinda… came to light recently,” Avi goes on. “And I don’t want that affecting Kyran.” His chin tilts in my direction. “And your *dad*…” He frowns, and I *hate* that he seems so stressed over this. “Your relationship with him is already awful. I don’t want to make it worse…”

My eyes flick to Bridget, who’s staring at me.

“If we’re being honest, he’ll probably be more upset that you’re dating a guy than the fact that it’s his wife’s son,” Bridget mutters, scoffing at the ridiculousness of it.

And the saddest part is that I know she’s right. If Avi was female, my father would care infinitely less about me falling for a stepsibling. But because he’s a *man*, it’s going to turn up his Biblical hate-o-meter to full power.

Fucking asshole.

“Well, I don’t give a fuck,” I state firmly. “When we get back to Boston, I’m telling him the truth. I don’t care if he has a problem with it. He stopped being my father a long time ago, anyway.”

I pause when I realize what I said, eyes shifting to Avi, who’s blinking at me, once again, like he’s *desperate* to know what I mean by that.

“Ky…” Bridget jumps in before he can potentially ask. “I’m just so happy for you. You have no idea how ecstatic I am that you’re finally feeling comfortable enough with who you are to be with someone.”

My stomach twists almost violently at her words.

I know she’s only being supportive, but it’s whipping up a tornado of jitters inside me. Muscles tense all over my body, and all sorts of things start rumbling up from where they’ve been lying dormant in my mind.

Avi’s forehead creases, unease etching his face. I can only imagine what he must think… *Based on Bridget’s words, I know how it might seem…*

His mouth opens, but I speak before he can.

“You’re the only one, baby,” I whisper to him, my voice shaking a little. “I promise.”

Avi looks worriedly between me and Bridget, and I glare at my sister.

“I’m sorry… You know that’s not what I meant, Ky,” she says. “I’m just happy you’re happy. That’s it.”

I nod, swallowing and swallowing over the bile trying to rise in my throat.

The smell of smoke and fragrant oils… The bitter taste of it in my mouth.

"I… I need to… use the… restroom." I stand fast, wobbling as I do.

Avi's hand flies up to steady me by gripping my waist. "Baby… are you alright?"

"I'm f-fine."

Brushing him off, I stagger away from the table, stomping toward the men's room. I rush to the sink to splash some water on my face. Bent at the waist, I rub my eyes, slowly lowering my hands to stare at myself in the mirror.

This is you…

This has always been you.

Closing my eyes tight, I shake my head. *No…* Avi *is responsible. He helped me find the real me… Him and his strength and his brutal openness. Just him.*

He's the… only one.

A voice thunders in my mind, rattling my foundation. *You know that isn't true.*

I suck air into my lungs, breaking past the suffocation in my chest.

"He made you this way…

He made you for me.

Now beg for forgiveness."

"Stop…" I gasp, heaving for breath.

"Baby, are you okay?"

Following the sweet, worried voice, I find Avi stalking inside the restroom. His hands are on me in an instant, rubbing my back and caressing my hair.

I can't really speak. I'm quivering too hard, clinging to everything about him in this moment. The fact that he always seems to find me when I need him the most, no matter how much I push him away.

His familiar scent that I can feel, like arms wrapping around a scared, shaken boy. The way his eyes actually *see* me… The real me.

It's terrifying, but I need it. I need *him*.

"Kyran, please talk to me." His grungy voice is racked with emotion as he pleads. "Tell me what's wrong…"

I can't…

I can't tell you because you'll leave me. That's what happens.

Confessing the truth drives people away.

"Nothing, I just…" I finally manage to scrape out some words, straightening and leaning into him while I breathe slowly. "I just got freaked out for a second. But I'm fine now."

"Baby, you know you can tell me anything, right?" he says, pacifying me with soft touches. "Anything at all… You can say it, and I promise I won't judge you, or freak out." He cups my jaw, forcing me to look at him. "I'm here for you because I love you, Kyran. And nothing is gonna change that."

Gnawing on my lower lip, I stare at him, swimming in the hazy blue mist of his eyes. I know he's not lying… He really feels that what he's saying is true.

But I also know that it won't matter. He'd judge me if he found out. It wouldn't be his fault; it would just happen. It's a knee-jerk reaction.

The truth would change everything. That's what it does.

And if I end up losing Avi the way I lost my family… I don't think I'll want to exist anymore.

Love is fragile… delicate as glass.

And my truth is a stone thrown.

So I straighten and rest my hands on Avi's chest, pulling the mask securely back into place. "I'm fine, baby. I'm just stressed about the game." His brows knit together, but I ignore it and press a kiss on his frown. "Come on. Let's get back."

Avi's lips part, but before he can speak, a man bursts into the restroom, stomping over to the urinals. He pauses, giving Avi and me a sharp look before turning and going onto one of the stalls instead.

Avi's gaze narrows in the guy's direction, jaw visibly ticking with an obvious thought.

Homophobe.

"Don't worry, we're not interested in your shriveled old dick," Avi calls out, grabbing me by the arm and pulling me along, out of the men's room.

A strained laugh leaves my lips, and Avi peeks at me, showing me one of his cocky smiles.

I love this man… I really do.

I just wish it wasn't buried under a hundred thick layers of complication.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

erthfairyy: Can I just say how beautiful you both are? You're fucking gorgeous. I'd let you both eat crackers in bed. *And then crack me in half*
Sincerely,
NotYourBabys_Daddy

I picked the absolute *worst* time to quit smoking.

After Kyran admitted his feelings for me, I decided it was time. I don't want to dull my senses anymore… I want to experience every single second of being in love with him. Because I've never been in love before, and being in it with Kyran Harbor is like going on a tour of Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory. You want to be fully present so you don't miss out on any of the wonder…

But you also need to be on your best behavior. Because there's a mercurial weirdo with you every step of the way, who won't warn you if you're about to get zapped into a television set or turn into a giant blueberry.

Over the years, I've relied heavily on smoking mass amounts of weed in order to combat my anxiety. Turns out, I was numbing myself so much, I wasn't even sure if I could feel *anything*.

But the thing I've come to realize is… some anxiety is good. It's *normal*. You're supposed to feel things. We're made to feel all emotions, good *and* bad. And I guess it took falling for Kyran to realize I don't mind feeling the bad sometimes, if it means I get to truly bask in the glory of the good.

I was proud of myself for this revelation. Until right now… sitting in Rose Bowl Stadium with my knee bouncing like Tigger on speed, wondering if there's any chance the smog I'm inhaling could have trace amounts of THC in it.

Weed's been legal here for a while… It's possible.

I think you get the picture. I'm stressed.

This game is fucking huge. I mean… *gargantuan*. Televised all over the country. NFL scouts are here. Not to mention, I'm sitting in an entire section of our players' families and friends, next to Kyran's estranged sister, who I've known for less than twenty-four hours.

Bridget is a very sweet girl. *Okay*, maybe not *sweet*. But she's cool as shit, super nice, and it's clear how much she loves Kyran.

Yet there's something about being in her presence that triggers something in Kyran… Something I've only ever seen happen to him around one other person… his father.

Sure, there are differences in the interactions. Kyran doesn't get along with his dad at all, but he loves Bridget to death. In fact, it seems to me like they both can't stand Tom, and I just can't figure out why.

Tom's not perfect… We know this. He's uptight and judgmental, and he's certainly gotten less fun over the years. But still, I don't know that this would warrant the kind of obvious disdain Bridget has for him, or the way Kyran has always walked on eggshells around him.

I remember Christmakkah Eve, when Kyran told me he felt like *he* was the one who broke up their family. He said it with such certainty… as if there's any possible way a twelve-year-old could be responsible for his parents splitting up. I know it can be common for kids to blame themselves for divorce… But I always thought once you grow up, you figure out that it isn't true.

Kyran *still* feels that way. He's still wearing this burden he's been carrying around since he was a kid, and it's the same pressure that's turned him into an epic control-freak. His need to portray this perfect image… I can only imagine how exhausting it must be.

And then there's the Bridget factor.

Last night at dinner, she said she was happy that Kyran could *finally feel comfortable enough with who he is* to be with someone. As if perhaps she's known for quite some time that Kyran is gay…

And her saying that launched him into this whirl of panic that really freaked me out for a second.

As far as *I* knew, Kyran was always straight, up until we started hooking up. He's always dated girls, never so much as mentioned any other experimentation, and even fought me on it for the majority of our sexual encounters.

So what would make Bridget say something like that…?

What is the real reason the Harbor family split up?

Why did she leave, and never come back?

I have so many questions, there are question marks spilling out of my ears. And I know it's not the time or place, but I really want to get at least a few answers. It would be nice if Kyran would tell me this stuff himself… All I want is for him to feel comfortable enough to confide in me. But I don't really see that happening, especially after the way he threw up the ropes and closed himself off last night. So even though I know it's a clear violation of his trust to probe his sister for information, I don't think I'll be able to help myself.

The whole thing has me so antsy, I've already killed an entire pack of Twizzlers.

And on top of it all… this *game*.

The first quarter is already winding down, and I feel like we were just watching the coin toss. It's flying by fast, the nerves and adrenaline of watching the man I love down there on the field making me so jittery I can hardly sit still.

"Avi." Bridget drops her hand onto my knee, stopping its incessant bouncing. "Relax." I peek at her, and she chuckles. "*Breathe*. Jesus, your leg's gonna fall off."

"Sorry," I sigh on an exhale. "I'm just really nervous…"

My eyes stay on Kyran as he bends at the waist and prepares for the snap. We're much farther away than I'm used to being… Usually I'd be on the sidelines with a clear view of his facial expressions and his subtle movements. Up here, it's like I'm watching him on TV, only surrounded by ninety thousand cheering fans.

The ball is hiked to him, and Kyran straightens, stepping backward with his arm cocked. Guty is open down the field, so he launches the ball, and it soars, spiraling to our wide receiver. Guty catches it and steps twice before he's tackled. But still. First down.

Everyone cheers, including me. *That's my man down there…*

"See? No need to be nervous," Bridget says to me with a smile. "Your boyfriend's got this in the bag."

A smile curves my lips, though it's still tense. I just can't help it… There's so much going on, and I have no weed to fill my lungs with. Not even a goddamn edible.

Oh, and did I mention we didn't even get to fuck last night??

Yea, that was fun. After dinner, I went straight back to the hotel, showered, and parked my ass in bed waiting for Kyran to show up so I could give him his good luck dick. Then he texted me that Coach wasn't letting any of them go anywhere, and it was too risky for him to try to sneak out.

If I'd known that was gonna happen, I would have fucked him in the bathroom of the damn restaurant. *I bet the guy who gave us a dirty look for touching each other would've really loved that.*

The second quarter flies by just like the first, fast and action-packed. Notre Dame is on fire, their defense doing a number on our running game. But no matter how hard they try to stifle the connection between Kyran and his receivers, they can't stop us from scoring.

Kyran's already thrown two touchdown passes, sinking balls down the field at every opportunity. By halftime, the score is twenty-four to fourteen, Eagles in the lead. My stomach flutters as I watch Kyran run off the field, knowing he's probably being all serious and tense, wishing he could control every move made around him.

I hope he finds time to look at his palm… Trace those lines. Calm down and remember to enjoy this.

"You wanna grab a beer?" Bridget asks, standing up and stretching out her arms.

We're both wearing number nine jerseys, and she even painted a *9* on her cheek with maroon and gold sparkles.

Considering it for a second, I stand by her side. "Sure, why not."

Beer isn't weed. It's fine.

We leave our seats to go find a concession stand, where Bridget orders two beers, waiting until we're far enough away to hand one to me, since ya know… I'm not twenty-one just yet.

"So are you a football nut like Kyran?" I ask Bridget with a grin while we putter around inside the lower level of the stadium.

She chuckles. “I’ve always loved football. We grew up watching it together… Mainly because Dad was so into it. But you have to admit, there’s nothing quite like it.”

“I don’t know.” I shrug. “There are other exciting sports, I guess… What about hockey?”

“Why is hockey exciting?” She peers at me with a smirk. “They don’t even let the players fight anymore,” she scoffs. “Highly stifles the raging testosterone in the air. Plus, they’re just moving back and forth. Same as basketball, soccer…”

My head tilts, because I guess she has a point.

She grins. “But *football*… Football is do or die. I read a statistic the other day that said one hundred percent of players in the NFL suffer injuries of some kind. One. Hundred. Percent. That means no matter what, you’re guaranteed to get hurt. How messed up is that?” She breathes a soft laugh, like she’s awed by this staggering fact. “American football is by far the most thrilling of all the big, traditional sports. It’s almost barbaric in a way, but it’s complex and captivating, if you can catch on. Football isn’t just game, it’s a *lifestyle*. It’s heart-pumping, adrenaline spiking action, from start to finish.”

Smirking, I narrow my gaze at her. “Are you a Patriots fan? Because you sound like one…”

Bridget throws her head back in laughter that has me chuckling. Then she aims a knowing look at me. “You better be prepared, kid. This is just the beginning… If Kyran gets drafted to the NFL, you’re gonna need a sedative.”

Yea, that’s what I’m afraid of.

Taking a large gulp of my beer, I allow the substance to calm me as much as it can. “The thing is, I’m not afraid he won’t win. He is *that* good. But I just… I worry about how much pressure he puts on himself. To be the best, ya know?”

She nods, her eyes shifting away from mine as she sips from her cup.

I need to know what she knows… I need to know what I’m up against, being with Kyran.

“You know, when he was little, he used to be so chill,” she says, staring off into space. “He was the kid all the other kids wanted to be around. Always smiling and laughing.”

I’m reeling from what I’m hearing right now. *Are we talking about Kyran* Harbor*??*

Bridget keeps talking. “And it wasn’t because he was raised that way or anything, because trust me, my dad worked constantly. And as soon as we were old enough to fend for ourselves, my mom backed way off. But that didn’t matter to us, because we had each other. Nothing else mattered…” Her voice trails off a bit before she mumbles, “It was like us against the world.”

Her expression grows less nostalgic and more remorseful as she sips her drink. “But then we grew apart a little… I started paying more attention to my friends. I mean, I was fourteen, it’s just what you did. It’s the most selfish time in any kid’s life. Kyran lost his carefree side, and started following the rules more… The only place he always felt comfortable was the football field.”

She smiles whimsically, and my lips curve, a warmth of pride for how far he’s come filling my chest.

But then Bridget’s smile falls away and she murmurs, “I should have paid more attention… to why he was becoming so nervous. I should have been there more… told my father to fuck off with that—” Her voice cuts out, and she peeks at me. But she doesn’t finish her sentence. She just gulps her drink back fast.

I’m just staring at her, confused and uneasy, because this isn’t about a divorce. *There’s something else going on here.*

“Bridget…” I speak her name firmly, and her eyes flit to mine again. “Why did your parents split up?” She stares at me, chewing on her bottom lip. “What happened that made you both want to escape so badly…?”

Her jaw drops as she gapes up at me, so much guilt and anguish in her eyes, I can almost feel it hitting me in waves. She looks like she’s about to say something… Like it’s on the tip of her tongue and she wants to unburden herself so badly, it’s *killing* her not to.

But then people start filing by us, back to their seats, a commotion likely indicating that halftime is almost over.

And she clears her throat, giving her chin a little shake. “I’m gonna grab another drink before we head back.”

I watch her wandering away with her head down, my mind sifting through her words. *If Kyran used to be so free-spirited… what clipped his wings?*

That's it. I'm gonna puke.

My heart is officially lodged in my throat, and I can barely breathe.

This game is driving me to drink. I'm not sure what happened at halftime, but Notre Dame came back with a fire under their asses.

They scored two touchdowns on back-to-back drives, and their defense pulled out all the stops. I'm guessing they realized Kyran is a force to be reckoned with, because they've been all over our receivers, forcing us to run the ball, which can only take us so far. To top things off, Theo missed a field goal… His first miss of the season.

I feel awful. Theo is a crazy talented kicker, and I just know the pressure probably got to him.

I remember him storming off the field, whipping his helmet at the bench so hard it scuffed the paint. Kyran was trying to talk to him, grabbing him by the arm like he wanted to calm his friend down. But Theo was visibly pissed, and I get it.

The Eagles needed the points. And we still do now.

We're down by fourteen, with only five minutes left in the game. Coach Matthews is visibly screaming at the huddle of our offense. I can't hear what he's saying, but I have to assume he's not happy, and that he's putting the fear of God in these players right now.

That man has always sort of terrified me. He's so quiet… Until he isn't.

"Kyran's gonna do something," I mumble, pushing past the doubt in my voice. "He has to."

"These fighting fucking Irish…" Bridget scoffs, then hollers, "Show 'em how Irish really fight, Ky!"

Everyone around us cheers, but I can't even move. My hands are clasped together so tightly I think I might break my own fingers.

Kyran and our offensive line jog back onto the field, and I know I can't see his face, but somehow, I can *feel* how tense he is. It's like we're both down there, and I'm sitting inside his body with him, sharing his nervous frustration.

The ball is punted to Guty, and he catches it. Then he takes off running, weaving in between Notre Dame defense for a return. The crowd around me

is screaming and hollering. I think Guty's family is sitting right behind us because my eardrums have officially blown out.

Someone finally gets him down, but he managed to gain twenty-six yards. Kyran says something to him when they're all gathered around setting up for the next drive. Guty nods and they smash their helmets together.

"Come on, baby…" I whisper. "You've got this on lock."

There's the snap. Kyran hands off the ball to Benito to run it. But then he steps back and whips the ball in Guty's direction. They faked the hand-off, and seamlessly, I might add.

Notre Dame is unprepared, and Guty is a fucking *madman*. He catches the ball and runs faster than I've ever seen any human move before. He gets all the way to the fifteen-yard line before he's knocked out of bounds. But no matter. We're in scoring position now.

"Fuck yea!" I shout while Bridget *woos* and we high-five. "That's what I'm talkin about!"

"Number eighty-one is a beast!" Bridget cheers.

"That's my son!" a lady with tanned skin and short spiky hair says from behind us, clear excitement shaking her voice.

"You're Guty's mom?" I ask her, and she nods enthusiastically. "He's a great guy."

"Are you from BC?" she asks, and I nod.

"I'm Kyran's…" The words come to a fast bottleneck in my mouth. *Stepbrother? Friend? Boyfriend? Why the hell do I not know what to say right now?!* I clear my throat. "I'm the Eagles's mascot."

Bridget shoots me a look, to which I shrug.

"*You're* the Eagle?!" Guty's mom gasps. "We love you!" I grin humbly, mimicking a bow. "You should be down there with them, cheering them on!"

"I wish…" I mumble. And the conversation stops because the ball is in the air.

Fellows catches it in the end zone, and we all jump out of our seats.

"Yea, bitch!" I scream while everyone goes wild.

"Hold up," a guy sitting next to Guty's mom calls out. "There's a flag down."

"Who threw it??"

The ref announces over the speaker. “Holding. Offense, number seven. Ten-yard penalty. First and goal.”

“That’s bullshit!” Bridget squawks.

“Holding my ass!” Guty’s mom screams, and she and Bridget tap their cups together in a cheers.

“Hey, ref! I’ve got something you can hold!” the guy next to Guty’s mom roars, grabbing his crotch.

“Mijo…” she scolds, shaking her head at him.

“It’s fine, it’s fine,” I mumble, mostly to myself. “They’ve got this.”

I can tell Kyran is pissed, but not once do you see him react to it. He pats number seven, Sean Cameron, on the back, and they get ready to try again.

The play is live and I’m sweating. Notre Dame’s defense is covering the crap out of everyone in the end zone. Kyran has nowhere to send the ball, so he starts to run, doing his best to dodge the guards and tackles. He gets within a step of the end zone, and some big asshole knocks the ball out of his hands.

“Fuck!” Bridget and I both gasp at the same time, everyone’s eyes locked in suspense on the field.

The ball flings up into the air. A Notre Dame guy lunges for it.

But then Kyran reaches up and grabs it, securing it back into his arms as he falls into the end zone.

There’s a split second of silence when we’re all just staring. Collectively breathless.

The ref’s hands shoot up, and we all go wild.

Touchdown!

Bridget and I are hugging onto each other, screaming like total freaks.

“Oh my God, that was so close,” she squeals, pounding the rest of her drink.

“They’re going for the two-point conversion,” Guty’s mom says, gripping onto the arm of the guy who’s sitting next to her. Based on how much he looks like Guty, I’d be willing to bet it’s his brother.

“Escúchame, hermano…” the guy murmurs to himself, as if he’s talking to Guty. *So definitely his brother.* “Get us those two points.”

Kyran is shouting to his offensive line so loudly I can hear his voice up here. He’s pointing and gesturing to them, nodding to the guys at his side as they take position.

The snap brings immediate chaos. It's hard to even tell what's happening, but I think I see the ball being passed left. But then it looks like it's on the right. And then Kyran is shooting the ball over everyone's heads to Guty, who somehow ducks himself out of the hold of two guys and catches it.

The crowd erupts in cheers and howls while we watch Guty do his celebratory dance in the end zone.

"That's my brother right there!" the guy behind us shouts.

My eyes follow Kyran off the field as I send him as many good vibes as possible. We still need to keep Notre Dame from scoring, and *then* score once more to win.

Almighty Tom Brady… We need a miracle.

Notre Dame's quarterback, Connor Devlin, takes the field with his guys, and I can tell they mean business. Our defense is working hard at choking them up, but they're moving slowly up the field.

Gazing down at Kyran on the bench, I can see his knee bouncing the way mine was earlier. *I wish I could be down there…*

"It's not over until it's over, baby…" I whisper.

Devlin throws an incomplete, and two more attempts at running get them nowhere. So they go for a field goal.

"I don't want to pray for anyone to fail, but Father, make this boy miss," Guty's mom whimpers. Bridget and I can't help but laugh.

Notre Dame's kicker kicks. The ball soars.

I hold my breath.

And the ref's arms go out at his sides. *No good.*

"Yes!" We all jump up screaming, hugging onto each other in a huddle while we bounce around.

"Oh my God, they're gonna do it!" Bridget cries.

"Shut up! Don't jinx them." I yank her back down into her seat.

We're clutching one another, watching as Theo punts the ball. Two minutes left in the game. And Kyran is preparing to take the field one last time.

This is the moment of truth… The make or break.

If we can score one more touchdown, we'll be NCAA Champions.

I'm not breathing. The noise around me has faded into the background, and all I can hear is the thump of my heart… As if it's mirroring the thump in Kyran's chest.

He moves gracefully, stepping like it's a delicate dance, launching the ball in a way that feels almost godlike. He's truly incredible to watch. The strength and the focus, the way he breathes the game in and out of his lungs.

Kyran Harbor was meant to do this. Plain and simple. Right now, it's as clear as crystal.

He's going to the NFL. There's no way he isn't.

And for the first time, that thought doesn't scare me. It doesn't fill me with worry or doubt, about him leaving Boston. This is bigger than any of that…

Football is his destiny.

And cards on the table, I will gladly follow him wherever he goes. *If he wants me to…*

First down after first down, they drive, and it's tense. It's fucking suffocating, but they do it. And when he finally finds his shot, Kyran takes it.

His arm flies up. The ball soars.

Guty catches it.

Touchdown.

The Eagles just won the fucking *Rose Bowl, baby.*

I'm not sure I've ever spazzed so hard in my life. We're all jumping and screaming. I'm hugging Bridget and she's crying. Guty's family is alerting nearby dogs with their high-pitched squeals of delight.

It's fucking *epic*. I can't believe it… Except that I *can*, because my man is *that good*.

I've literally never been so proud.

"Your boyfriend is gonna get drafted," Bridget sobs in my ear, and I chuckle while she shakes me around. "Where do you think he's gonna go?!"

"Hopefully somewhere nice," I sigh, my mind spinning through thoughts of various places in this great big country.

And hopefully he'd want me to come, too.

Biting my lip, I watch as Theo nails the extra point, and we all cheer for him because really, he's the one who just solidified the whole thing. I never thought about it before… how much the team relies on their kicker. Theo is amazing at what he does. I hope he doesn't give himself too much grief for missing one field goal in an entire season.

But if he's anything like Kyran, I'm sure he'll be beating himself up.

Kyran is just so fucking adorable right now, I can't stand it. He and Guty are hanging all over each other, their teammates crowding around them in widespread celebration. Notre Dame's offense lingers, with only fifteen seconds on the clock, the game is deemed over.

What a rush. A spectacular end to a wild season.

"I'm sorry, I didn't get either of your names," Guty's mom says to us over the noise, and *"All I Do Is Win"* bumping over the speakers.

"I'm Avi," I tell her. "This is Bridget. Kyran's sister."

"Liz Gutierrez." She grins. "This is my son, Marco." Guty's brother nods at us as Liz asks, "Are you two coming to the party?"

I glance at Bridget, anxiety weaseling its way up again. I hadn't really planned on going to the party… I know Kyran will be the star of the show, and the idea of tagging along makes me feel a little awkward.

But Bridget nudges me. "You know he's gonna want you there."

Gulping, I nod hesitantly.

Guty's mom and brother wave at us as they disappear into the crowd. And I'm even more nervous now… We all know parties full of football players aren't my scene.

Buck up. You'll have to get used to it if he goes to the NFL…

I just wish I could see Kyran right now. It's so different when we're alone. But every second we're not together is spent with mountains of doubt rising between us.

My eyes fall back down to the field, where a reporter is interviewing Kyran. He looks so happy. And *I'm* happy that he's happy. *So I guess that's all that matters.*

"So, what's up?" Bridget asks. "You wanna go wait for him?"

Watching Kyran, I shake my head. "Nah, he's doing his thing right now. We can go back to the hotel. That's where the party is happening, anyway."

Bridget nods, and we fight the psychotic body traffic out of the stadium until we reach the even more ridiculous car traffic. It takes us a bazillion years to get back to the hotel, and by the time we're there, I really need a freaking drink.

"Let's go to the bar," Bridget says as we walk inside.

"I'm only twenty," I mumble.

"Ugh, God. I forgot you're both fetuses," she scoffs.

I laugh and shake my head. "There's a minibar in my room."

Up in my hotel room, we crack open a bottle of tequila and pour two shots to celebrate the BC Eagles being big, fancy NCAA Division I Champions.

"I'm so fucking proud of him…" I breathe as the liquor burns its way down my throat.

"I can see that." Bridget grins. "You looked like you were gonna die when the ball was in the air that last time."

I chuckle. "It's just… I don't know. Watching him play this entire season, while everything else has been going on between us… I feel like I've been a part of it, ya know?" I shake my head, fiddling with my chipped nail polish. "I've never felt like that before."

"You *are* a part of it, Avi," she says, and I glance up. "You're the mascot." I huff, but she pins me with a look. "I'm serious. I know it seems like a goofy thing, but you were there pumping them up, rooting for them. Rooting for *him*."

I purse my lips. "It was just fun to be included."

"I wasn't kidding when I said your name came up every time we talked." She smirks. "Any time I'd call him after a game, he'd be like, *'And Avi was over there doing the Gangnam Style dance…'*"

I laugh out loud while she snickers.

"Dead ass. I didn't want to piss him off by saying anything, but it was super obvious he never stopped paying attention to you."

"It was impossible for me to hate him…" I murmur truthfully while she pours two more shots. "Believe me, I tried. He was a real jerk to me at times…"

"I believe it."

"But underneath it, I always just wanted him to like me. And the high of getting someone like him interested in someone like me was unlike anything…"

"Avi, who are you kidding? You know you're perfect for him," she says.

"I don't *know* that…"

"Yes, you do. Trust me. I've only known you for a day, and I can see it. I saw it last night the second you two walked in and sat down next to each other, like there was no possible *way* you could be apart. You're exactly what my brother needs. Someone supportive and patient, who's gonna love him no matter what. Someone who calls him on his bullshit and loves the stubborn out of him."

We take our shots, and she breathes out slowly. “But mostly, someone who will stay by his side. He doesn’t need to be abandoned any more…”

“Bridget, he doesn’t hold that against you,” I tell her, and her deep amber eyes slink to mine. In this light, you can see so much of Tom in her.

“But *you* do…” she whispers.

My jaw tightens, but I shake my head. “It’s not my place.”

“Bullshit. You’re family. And now, you’re also Kyran’s partner. It *is* your place to be pissed off on his behalf.”

I slump back in my chair and sigh. “I guess it’s just that I don’t understand why you left. I don’t get the whole thing… I don’t understand why Kyran is so convinced your family split up because of him.”

Bridget’s eyes set on the marble island between us as she mumbles, “It wasn’t his fault…”

“No shit,” I grunt. “But *why* does he feel like that?? It makes no fucking sense.”

She pours more booze into her cup, whipping it back. “Because our asshole father made him feel like it was.”

What…?

My gaze at her narrows. “Why? *Why* would Tom do that to a twelve-year-old kid?”

Bridget goes quiet for a moment, the suspense and angst building a thickness in the air. “It’s not my place to tell you about it… You should hear it from Kyran.”

Raking my fingers through my hair, I yank it. “You and I both know he won’t. And I *need* to know. Bridget, I’m really starting to freak out here. You’re making me think it’s like… something bad.”

When her gaze slides back up to mine, there are tears glistening her eyes. “It *is* bad, Avi. It was the worst thing that’s ever happened to anyone I know… And it happened to my *baby brother*.”

Oh God… This is too much. Jesus, I’m freaking the fuck out.

My gut is churning so hard I feel nauseous. I know it’s not right for me to demand answers… I *know* that. I should wait for Kyran to confide in me when he’s ready.

But I also know that if he’s suffering, stuffing down something awful from his past and pretending it doesn’t exist, that’s really not healthy. I want to be able to help him. To *love him*, no matter what.

“Just promise you won’t leave him…” Bridget whispers.

“I won’t fucking leave him unless he wants me to…” I shiver out the words. “Because I’ll do *anything* for him, even if it kills me,” I tell her with my fullest sincerity.

After all, it’s true. Kyran Harbor is the love of my life. That’s it.

I’ve fallen. Hook, line, and sinker, he has my whole heart.

Bridget slinks off her chair, padding across the room to her purse. She plucks her phone out of it, tapping away while I’m just staring at her, my heart beating its way up my esophagus.

She glares at something on the screen before sighing and sliding her phone over to me.

Picking it up, my eyes travel, reading the words. At first, I have no idea what I’m looking at… A legal document, or a settlement of some kind?

But the more I read, my heart proceeds to snap in half in my chest.

And with each word that follows, it cracks and slits and crumbles, my fingers shaking with rage and despair as I scroll down to the end.

There’s a picture.

“Is…” My voice will barely creep from my throat, I’m so shocked and appalled. So disgusted and angry and *horrified*. “Is this real? This is… him?”

Bridget sniffles, and I know she’s crying. But I can’t pry my eyes away from the phone in front of me. Every single fiber of my being is thrumming with wrath, woven around strands of aching empathy for my stepbrother.

The man I love. My *family*.

No matter what he is to me, even if he was a stranger, this would make me sick to my stomach. I feel myself retch as I shove the phone away, covering my face with my hands.

“Oh my God…” I’m quaking.

Sick and sad and more enraged than I’ve ever felt before.

“That’s Father McAdams,” Bridget whimpers, then snarls with the same fury I’m feeling in my veins. “The fucking monster who raped my brother when he was twelve.”

No… No, no, no, this isn’t true.

It can’t be.

Kyran… A soft sound escapes me as I rip my hair out of my head.

The words are spinning in my mind, being read aloud in my own voice.

The archdiocese has agreed to dismiss and laicize Father James McAdams of Cathedral of the Holy Cross in South Boston, per out of court

settlement with the family of Kyran Thomas Harbor, Somerville, MA.

The Church will pay out a sum of one-point-four million dollars to the family. Settlement professes nondisclosure…

"Bridget… I'm gonna be sick…" I cough, barely even recognizing my own voice as I stand up and sprint to the bathroom.

Heaving with my face on fire, I throw up the booze I just consumed. But I'm numb… I don't feel the burn and the wrenching pain in my gut. All I feel is excruciating, throbbing *anger*.

Falling back on my knees, I force myself to breathe, steadying enough to stand up on wobbly legs. I rinse my mouth out and splash water on my face, eyes traveling up to my reflection in the mirror. And I remember…

I remember the times I've seen Kyran do this.

Staring at himself in the mirror, like he's desperately trying to recognize himself.

Stumbling back into the room, I find Bridget shakily pouring herself another drink.

"A s-settlement??" I stammer, shaking my head.

This is fucking *insane*. I can't even process it. It's like my mind has completely shut down. I think I'm in shock.

She sips her drink, wincing before pushing out a long, hopeless breath. "It was the end of summer before my senior year of high school… Kyran had just come home from church camp, this dumb bullshit our parents used to make us do. I hadn't gone in a few years, because I'd whined and begged to go to camp with my friends instead. But Kyran was still going. We were supposed to go to the Cape in the morning… I was packing my… swimsuit." She chokes on the word and releases a quiet sob of a noise before roughly rubbing at her face, like she's trying to force away the terror of an awful memory.

"I heard a noise. Like a… thud. Coming from the upstairs bathroom," she speaks quietly, her wide gaze stuck on the marble countertop. "I rushed to the door and knocked, calling out to Kyran to see if it was him. If he was okay…" She stops again to breathe. "He wasn't answering me, and the door was locked, so I used a credit card to break in. He was… he was lying on the floor of the tub with the shower running and half the shower curtain ripped down."

My chest is somehow hollow and pulsing at the same time as she struggles out more words. "I thought he'd fallen, so I rushed over to him.

He didn’t look hurt, but he was… staring. Not blinking, just *staring*. I thought he was dead for a second, and I swear to God, I’ve never been so scared in my life. But then I realized he was breathing… trembling from head to toe.

“I wrapped him in a towel and got him out of the tub… He could barely walk, and I was *screaming* at him to tell me what was wrong, but he wouldn’t speak.”

I can somehow *see* everything she’s describing… *Young Kyran, frozen in shock.*

Broken.

My legs give out and I come crashing to the floor, sitting with my knees bent and my fingers threaded in my hair, gripping my skull.

“When I… mentioned that I was going to call an ambulance, he suddenly snapped out of it and his head started flinging back and forth while he cried *no*… over and over.” Bridget stops with tears tumbling down her cheeks and she swallows more liquor. “I took him into my room, got him dressed, and put him in my bed… And he was crying and crying. And *I* was crying because I didn’t know what was going on, but I knew it was bad, you know? When he finally calmed down enough to breathe and speak, he said, ‘Something happened.’” She wipes her nose with her hand, the sorrow on her face palpable. “That’s when I knew… I mean, I didn’t know the details. I didn’t need to… But I *knew* something terrible had happened to him, and *fuck*, I just wanted to rip myself open and give him whatever he needed to feel better. But there was *nothing* I could do… I’d already failed him. Because I didn’t protect him.”

She drops her head to the counter. “I was supposed to protect him.”

Without even realizing it, I’m crying. Silently whimpering grief for the love of my life.

And this brokenness he’s been holding inside for so long.

The room is silent for a while before Bridget continues. “Eventually, he told me what Father McAdams had done… And Avi… I’m telling you that I’ve never wanted so badly to hurt someone in my whole life. That night, I went to the asshole’s house. I took the bus, and I went to his *fucking house*… and I stood outside, thinking about if I could actually do it. If I could *kill* him…”

Her head lifts, and our eyes lock. I feel the hatred, the wrath, and the pain, moving between her and me, like a tangible force of energy.

My muscles stiffen and my teeth grind together. *I want that, too.* I don't even know this person, but I want him to burn alive in an inferno for all eternity. I want him to know exactly why he's being punished. I need him to *get* it.

"Obviously, I didn't," she huffs weakly. "He killed himself, by the way. They found him hanging from a light fixture in his study four years ago… With a piece of paper gripped in his fist that said *I'm sorry*." She cackles a furiously unamused laugh. "*Sorry?!* Fuck!" she screams, and I flinch as she jumps up and starts pacing around. She looks so much like Kyran right now, it's making me feel sick again. "Whatever, that's not the point. He got off way too easily, as far as I'm concerned. But that night when I came home, it turns out Kyran had told Dad. And do you wanna know what our father said…?"

I'm exhausted as I breathe, "I'm guessing he didn't believe him…"

"I'm sure he knew it was true," she grunts. "But he told him he was *overreacting*. That he was just making up stories that could destroy people's lives."

My eyes fall shut, jaw straining, as I slowly recline onto my back on the floor.

This is so completely fucking fucked.

I feel like I'm outside of myself, outside of reality. Watching some fucked-up movie…

This is what Kyran has been walking around with for eight years??

Jesus… Kyran.

Kyran… I whimper his name again and again in my mind.

"It smacked Tom in the face real hard when a few other kids came forward," Bridget whispers, staggering over for more booze. I think she's going to black out if she keeps up the way she's going. But then I don't exactly blame her. "But he still didn't want to believe it. He didn't want to *accept* it, because he's a coward. His goddamn faith meant more to him than his own son. His reputation, his place in the church… all that fucking bullshit… he chose it over Kyran. They settled in court, as long as everyone agreed never to speak of it. The money went into a trust in Kyran's name, but he said he'd rather die than touch a dime of it. He was fucking *thirteen years old*… dealing with this… This horror.

"So yea… I guess it did tear our family apart. Mom and Dad fought nonstop, and they filed for divorce three months later. But no one ever

stopped to check on Kyran. No counseling, no therapy. Nothing. *Denial*… That's it."

Bridget slumps down onto the floor by my feet. "I couldn't take it. That's why I left. I tried to get Kyran to talk to someone, but he was convinced all he needed to do was forget it ever happened. He wouldn't talk about it… wouldn't even acknowledge it. Because that's what Dad *told* him to do. So I applied to school out here… And I fucking left. Because I couldn't spend one more second near that man. I wanted to forget my father even existed for the way he treated Kyran. I was a coward too…"

She whispers, curling up into a ball on the floor, "Because I left him. I should've stayed… Just to be there for him. But I was too *angry*. I still am. It burns inside me every day, like another piece of myself made of rage. I'm not satisfied with that monster copping out and hanging himself. And I'm so *proud* of Kyran, and how incredible he turned out, despite everything, but… god-fuckin-damnit, I just hate my father so fucking much."

Blinking, my eyes follow the lines of the ceiling, mind expanding and contracting through this information like weak lungs struggling to breathe. The helplessness inside me… it reminds me of when I was six. When I found out I would never see my father again.

It's a misery that swallows you whole… A suffering at knowing there's nothing you can do to change it.

Life… This is the pain of life, and it's just so motherfucking bleak.

The endless void of silence is broken when my phone pings in my pocket. Pulling it out, I focus my blurred vision on the screen.

Kyran: BABY!!!!!!!!!!!!

A choked sob leaves my lips, tears welling in my eyes and a happy-sad grin curving my mouth. Two more quick texts pop up, radiating his excitement.

Kyran: We did it! We did it Avi…

Kyran: God I can't wait to see you baby.

My heart is trying to pump itself back to life, seal together all the wounds from uncovering the horrible the truth and just *love* him. Be happy for him, because *damnit*, he seems so *happy*.

I can't believe he can be so happy, even with this stuff living inside him.

He's truly amazing.

My trembling fingers are struggling to type out a message as he keeps texting me.

Kyran: Are you coming to the party??? We're on our way back to the hotel now. I just have to change and then we'll be down there.

Kyran: I hope you're not mad that I couldn't see you right away after the game… It was such a whirlwind. I just got done showering after all the interviews and everything. Plus Coach popped a bottle of Dom in the locker room, so I'm a lil tipsy lol

Kyran: I wanna kiss you so bad babe. I'm gonna kiss you in front of EVERYONE :)

Jesus, my fucking heart. I can't even breathe…

Me: I love you, Kyran. I am so fucking proud of you.

He must really be tipsy because he sends me a bunch of emojis. An eggplant, a peach, and five water-squirts.

My chest shakes with a laugh as I wipe tears from my eyes.

Kyran: Come to the party… please. I need you Avi.

Me: I wouldn't miss it for the world gorgeous.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

theBSTpwrbttm: I want you both to rail me and then pretend you love me like you love each other. *Swoon*
BigD1ckDeacon: Do you need a sin for your next confession?

Kyran

Wanna hear something funny?

I've known since I was a little kid that someday I'd win a championship trophy.

Ever since I was old enough to throw a football, this has been my goal. The endgame.

Holding this trophy in my hands and knowing that I helped win it for my team.

I'm fully aware this isn't something a lot of people can say. It's pretty rare to have a goal in mind from the time you're a kid and actually *achieve* it, dodging all the obstacles thrown in front of you and still managing to get there.

It's weird, and fascinating and incredible, the way life works out sometimes…

But that's not the funny part.

The thing that's had me casually stopping to smile over the last couple of hours, while we were celebrating in the locker room, changing out of our uniforms, then piling into our bus and sing-screaming *"We Are The Champions"*… while Guty literally picked me up and carried me into our hotel room and I was laughing so hard I couldn't breathe… while I changed into my winner's suit—*the suit I picked out specifically for this party*—and made my way downstairs to the hotel conference room that's been

elaborately decorated with maroon and gold, and fully stocked with food… is how all I want, in the whole wide world, is just to hold Avi Vega's hand.

It's hilarious to think that after this fantastic achievement, amidst the high of the win, the thing that has my stomach fluttering and my fingers twitching isn't that trophy across the room… It's the anticipation of seeing Avi's smile. Hearing his voice croon about how proud he is, listening to his smartass comments, and watching his flirtatious smirky expressions. Sharing this experience with someone who loves me, and who I love in return… And feeling like it's *right*, despite what I've spent so many years trying to talk myself out of.

The win would be worthless if I hadn't fallen in love with him.

It's a mystifying truth, but it *is* the truth. Because after every other game I've ever won, the excitement has only been skin-deep. For the first time ever, it actually *means* something.

It's not about making my dad proud… When he called me, I barely even cared. I just couldn't stop thinking about Avi, and I'm as thrilled as I am baffled by the way this love has swept me up, like I'm floating on a cloud.

Everything feels infinitely more *real* being in love with him.

I'm just about to text him again and ask where he is when he walks through the door… and my heart skips in my chest.

Beautiful. That's the word that thumps with the blood pumping through my veins. As my eyes take in the sight of him in his ripped jeans and a collared shirt, loose skinny tie around his neck. I have to chuckle, because he looks so out of place, and I love it.

Figures that it would take someone like him to breathe me back to life. He's so… *different*. Unique, like a mosaic. Complex little pieces glued together to make a purely stunning creation.

When he spots me, he smiles. And I smile too… *I can't seem to stop.* He struts over to me, and I walk to him, biting the inside of my cheek to keep myself from looking crazy. His eyes are wide and sparkling, a seriousness etching them that doesn't fit his typically carefree presence. But I assume it's because he's not usually comfortable at these football parties, surrounded by jocks he doesn't relate to. And I know I haven't made it easy on him in the past…

The regret I feel at how awfully I treated him in front of these people still weighs on me constantly. But I'm on a mission to do better for him. To

prove that if he can just be patient with me, I'll work past the fear I've been living with for so long, and be what he needs.

I can do that for him.

Throwing my arms around his shoulders, I pull him close to me in a hug that might look a tad too intimate. But I don't even care. I just need to feel his body on mine, his warmth and his size… I need to smell him.

My Avi candle.

It takes him a second, maybe from nerves, but he curls his strong arms around my waist and holds me back, releasing a long breath into the crook of my neck.

"Congratulations, superstar," he whispers, his voice raspier than normal and a little shaky. To think that he's as emotional over this as I am makes me happy.

He makes me so happy.

"Thank you for being here." I squeeze him tighter when he goes to pull away. "Thank you for… getting me here."

When we separate, I catch a crease in his forehead, and I just hope he knows I'm not talking about the football. I'm talking about this… *Us*.

His eyes are a little bloodshot, and I purse my lips. He's probably stoned… *as usual.* But I have no right to say anything… *Not yet, anyway.* The Avi I fell in love with smokes a lot of weed. It's not a problem for me if it's not a problem for him.

"Where's Bridget?" I ask, slinking my hands down his chest as we put distance between us.

I want to keep touching him… no matter who's looking. I'm filled with a beaming burst of confidence, from the win, and from seeing him now.

Avi's gaze falls to the floor between us, a shifty air about him as he mumbles, "She's up in my hotel room resting. She… wasn't feeling well. But she'll probably come down in a bit."

My brow furrows. "Oh… Okay. Do you think I should go check on her?"

"No, no." He shakes his head. "This is your party, baby. You need to be here celebrating being an NCAA muthafuckin' champion." His grin widens, and I chuckle.

"Do you want a drink? Or something to eat?" I ask, straightening his tie.

His eyes shift left then right, as if he's uneasy about people seeing us standing together this way; close, with me fussing over him.

“Avi…” I whisper, and he blinks sparkly blue-gray at me. “I… I want __”

“Yo! Look who’s here!” Guty’s voice booms, and I glance up to see him barreling over. “Baldwin made an appearance for the win!”

“Guty…” I huff, grinning, though I’m about to tell him not to call Avi that anymore.

But he grabs Avi by the arm and starts dragging him away. “I want you to meet my fam-bam.”

Avi shoots me a helpless look, and I chuckle, following after them. Guty brings Avi over to his mom and brother, who are chatting with Theo and his dad.

“Congrats on an amazing win,” Avi says to Guty, peeking at Theo. “All of you… You guys really killed it. I’m not surprised one bit, but just… congratulations. You deserve it.”

“Hey, they couldn’t have done it without your support at all the home games!” Guty’s mother, Liz, says, patting Avi on the shoulder.

Our faces all scrunch in confusion as Guty asks, “Wait, how’d you know he’s the mascot??”

“We met at the game,” Liz says with a smile. “He was sitting in front of us.” Her face tilts to me. “With your sister.”

“Ah…” I nod, while Guty does the same, and Theo introduces Avi to his dad.

“I love your moves,” Guty’s brother, Marco, says to Avi, and Avi chuckles, rubbing the back of his neck.

He definitely seems a little tense, but it makes sense in this situation. This isn’t normally the kind of thing Avi likes to do. But he’s doing it for me, which has warm tingles flooding my chest.

Liz nudges me, whispering, “Is this your boyfriend?” Her eyes flick to Avi, lips curled in an eager grin.

Avi’s eyes widen and he gapes at me like he’s not sure what would make her ask that.

My jaw drops, but before I can respond, Guty scoffs, “Mama! No esta su novio. Avi is Kyran’s *stepbrother*.”

Her face goes still, the smile falling away as her forehead lines in confusion. I can feel heat rising into my cheeks, and normally this would be the time for me to retreat into myself, coughing up some bullshit excuse;

some lie that doesn't feel good, but will help preserve the Kyran Harbor image everyone else sees.

But… I don't want to do that anymore.

I don't want to *lie* anymore.

No more hiding.

"Actually…" I croak, then clear my throat, reaching for Avi's hand. It's clammy, and I can feel his fingers shaking as I thread mine through them, yanking him closer to me. "She's right."

"Kyran…" Avi whispers frantically, shaking his head. "You don't have to do this. Not now…"

"I do, though." My lips quirk into a small smile, to let him know I'm fine. It's okay. *I can do this.* "I have to. I mean, I *want* to…"

"Ky, what's going on?" Theo tilts his head, his eyes falling to Avi's and my joined hands.

Peering at him, then Guty, I take in a small breath while they all gawk at me in silence. I won't say my heart isn't racing, because it is. But it feels *good*.

It's the way my heart races on the field. With millions of eyes and lights shining down on me… I exhale and I'm calm. *Focused.*

I squeeze Avi's hand.

Slow down, and let him catch you.

"We're together," I speak quietly, then straighten. "He's my boyfriend. I'm his…" My voice trails, and I peek at Avi, watching his lips slope into a timid smile. "I'm his boyfriend."

"You're so much fucking more than that," he breathes, and my heart jumps as I reach for his jaw.

"I know," I sigh, pulling his mouth to mine.

Kissing him. Fucking *kissing* him, in front of everyone.

I think I actually hear Guty gasp out loud, and I chuckle into Avi's mouth while he laughs back, hands sliding up my neck.

"My baby," he hums while our lips brush in just enough kiss for it to feel like a revelation. Not enough to scare the shit out of my teammates and their families, all of whom I know are now staring at us.

"*Yours*," I tell him as he moves back, and I press one more soft kiss on his mouth because I'm not done. *Not even close*.

"Ho-ly fuck!" Guty shouts, a shocked smile taking over his face.

"Samson!" Liz scolds him.

“Is this really happening…?” Theo’s eyes have never been wider.

“I freaking knew it!” Guty claps his hands together. “I *knew* you two were hiding something… After the way you spazzed on Ash Holloway at the party!”

“Yea, but you didn’t know they were banging,” Theo grunts.

“Theodore,” his dad grumbles, and Theo makes a face.

Then his head slopes right, to where even more people are gathering around us, including Coach Matthews. My hands slip down Avi’s chest while his do the same, and we separate, but not much. Leaning into him, I link my fingers with his, holding his hand again, to let him know we’re in this now.

No matter what happens… it’s us.

Kyran and Avi… we’re *real* now.

Coach looks to Avi, raising a brow. “You couldn’t just let us have one party, could you?” He scoffs, but I can see the amusement on his face, and Avi shows him a tense grin, shrugging.

Coach glances at the crowd, his eyes lingering for a moment, before they zero in on me. “We might need to talk in private, Harbor…”

I nod, swallowing hard. “I get that, Coach. I know how this looks, but I… I don’t care.” I square my shoulders, locking my confident gaze with his. “Right now, I just want to celebrate the win with my friends. And my boyfriend.”

His eyes narrow at me. But then he nods, letting out a sigh. “Yea. You deserve it.” Spinning, he flicks a hand at the crowd, shooing people away. “Alright, let’s give the kids some space.”

A bunch of my teammates are still glaring, whispering to each other. I definitely hear the word *stepbrother* a few times, and *OnlyFans* more than a few. But I ignore it all, tugging Avi along, over to a table so we can take a seat.

Naturally, Guty follows us.

“Do your parents know??” he asks, plopping down in the seat next to Avi that I was going to sit in. Avi grins, and I chuckle, shaking my head while I round him to sit on the other side.

“No one knows,” Avi murmurs, giving me a look like I’m insane for just dropping this bomb, right after winning the goddamn Rose Bow. *Okay, yea, I might be a little psycho.* “Except Frankie and Ky’s sister.”

“Do you think they’re gonna freak?” Guty asks.

But I answer, “I don’t care.” Scooting in closer to Avi, I rest my head on his shoulder.

Because I’m finally calm. It’s like a shot of serenity, being with him like this. Out in the open and not caring. *Sweet, peaceful transparency.*

Guty’s grin is nothing but supportive. Honestly, he looks beyond happy for us, and it’s such a relief. He leans in closer and whispers, “Are you **Not_Your_Baby**?”

Avi laughs while I tuck my face into his chest, shaking my head. “My client refrains from answering any further questions,” he teases, rubbing my back.

At that moment, Theo stomps over and plops into the seat next to Guty with a stressed breath and a bottle in his hand. “Anyone else wanna get drunk?”

Peeking up at Avi, I bite my lip at the sight of his sweet smile. It still looks a bit strained, and there’s something troubling in his eyes that I can’t quite pinpoint. But he seems happy, with his fingers running up into my hair.

“I could go for a drink,” he says to Theo, who’s pouring bourbon into the water glasses on the table.

Theo goes to hand him a glass, but he yanks it back before Avi can take it. “Did you two hook up at my party?” He cocks a brow.

Avi pulls an innocent look that I see right through. “What would make you think that?”

“Bea said she left you two alone in the bathroom.” He grins, then chuckles. “And it looked like Ky was about to murder you.”

“Yea, no. He totally kicked my ass.” Avi smirks, and Guty laughs.

“Right.” Theo smirks. “I’m sure *ass* was involved in some way.”

Avi gasps in faux outrage while I cackle and Guty hollers.

The four of us drink for a while, talking and laughing. More teammates come over to take shots, and celebrate our big win. And some of them look a little uncomfortable. But most of them are acting normal; smiling and supportive. Sure, they won’t stop incessantly prying Avi for details about the OnlyFans, but I guess that’s to be expected. Since he’s the disgraced porn king of BC.

More than anything, I’m just weightless. As if thousands of pounds have been lifted from my shoulders. I’m okay with the reality that not everyone will accept me for who I am, and I understand that I’ll have to answer

questions about the nature of my relationship with Avi, since he's my stepbrother. But none of that matters when his hands are on me in public.

That bubble of private intimacy we built up over months of hooking up in secret is now out in the open. It surrounds us, keeping us together and secluded from all the people.

It's fascinating… In a crowded room, we're still **Backwardz_Cap** and **Not_Your_Baby**. *Only with clothes on.*

As the night wears on, the team gets rowdier. And eventually, Guty and Theo announce that they want to go raise hell somewhere else.

"Let's go rip shots in the hotel room while we decide where to go." Guty pokes me repeatedly.

Chuckling, I peer at Avi, who's watching me carefully with studious eyes. He's been looking at me like that all night, and I don't really know where it's coming from.

It's like he's trying to read every inch of me to make sure I'm alright.

"Okay." I shoot Avi a quick glance, then nod to Guty. "I'll meet you in a few."

"Oh God… you're going to get laid, aren't you??" Guty groans, and Avi laughs.

Theo whips his drink back, his face all flushed. There's something going on with him, but I can't worry about it right now. Because *yea… I really wanna go get laid.*

"None of your business, chile." I wink at Guty, grabbing Avi by the arm and pulling him with me.

Guty slurs to Theo, "They're going to be gay together," and Theo coughs into his drink while Guty bursts into laughter.

"Your friends are almost as ridiculous as mine," Avi mumbles while we leave the room, powerwalking through the halls to the nearest elevator.

"It's not a competition, baby," I tease.

Pressing the elevator button a million times, I'm vibrating. Impatient, and needing to be alone with him right now before I combust. After everything… The game, and then coming out in front of the entire team, not to mention how hard-up I am, not having had his dick in me in *way* too many days… I'm really gonna have to focus on not coming too soon. Because I'm in desperate need of a slow dose right now.

The way his body eases everything inside me, all my restlessness and uncertainty. He quite literally fucks my troubles away.

“Wow, baby,” Avi chuckles as the elevator dings and I shove him inside. “You’re that wound up for me?”

Nodding, I crowd him as the doors close. And we’re alone, with just enough time for me to push him up against the wall and kiss his lips like a wild animal.

“I can’t help it,” I breathe in between sucking his mouth, feeding him my tongue while my hands rush all over, savoring the slopes and curves of hard muscle I can feel through his clothes. “You haven’t fucked me in so long, Avi… I’m having withdrawals.”

“I know.” He grabs my ass hard in two handfuls that have me grunting between his lips. “I should’ve just fucked you after that dance the other night…”

“Yea…” I whisper. “You should have. Oh, and P.S.… I’m wearing something special for you.” I grin, and he hums.

“Mmm… it better be my Christmakkah gift.” His fingers dig into my cheeks, and I’m trembling.

“Bare ass ready for you, baby,” I tease.

The way he growls is downright *slaughtering* me.

The elevator doors open while we’re still pawing at each other, and we force ourselves apart, scampering up the hall to his room.

“Fuck… Bridget,” I breathe while he fishes the room key out of his pocket, maneuvering around an obvious erection.

He shoots me a quick, nervous look, opening the door and peering inside.

“Bridget?” I call out, stomping around in search of any sign of my sister. But it doesn’t look like she’s here. “Bridges of Madison County??”

“Those nicknames are insane.” Avi chuckles, and I smirk at him.

“She must have left…” I bite my lip, sauntering up to him slowly. My hands glide up his chest, around his shoulders as I brush my crotch against his. Leaning in close to his ear, I flick the lobe with my tongue. “Bed. Now, please.”

“Baby…” he rumbles, almost hesitantly, and I just can’t figure out why he’s acting withdrawn and nervous.

At the party, sure. That made sense. But *now*? We’re alone. *Alone is our thing.*

Avi is never reserved when we’re alone. But right now, it’s like he’s pulling away.

His hands cup my jaw, and he stares deep into my eyes for a moment, chest moving with visible breaths. He's searching for something in my eyes…

It has me looking away. "Unless you don't want to…"

"What?" he rumbles as I pull away from him, turning my back because I don't want him to look at me like that anymore.

Like he knows even my happiest moments are marred by underlying brokenness.

"Did I put too much pressure on you down there, or something?" I rub the back of my neck, shaking my head. *Stupid idiot.…*

I don't know how to be with a guy. I guess I should be playing it cooler?

Avi stomps up to my back and spins me around. "No. Absolutely *not*." I try to look away again, but he grabs my face. "Hey… I love you. Kyran, I am so fucking proud of you for what did down there. I love you so damn much for doing that. I just want to make sure it's not moving too fast for you. I mean, Kyran from a few weeks ago never would have kissed me in front of his teammates and his Coach…"

"I don't wanna be Kyran from a few weeks ago," I murmur quietly. "I want to be the Kyran I am when I'm with you. The *real* Kyran… who isn't afraid anymore."

Avi pouts, and then chews on his lip for a moment. I can't distinguish what's different between us… But there's *something*, and it's twisting me up in knots.

Should we have just stayed a secret?? Did I ruin everything again??

But before I can let the doubts keep growing, Avi loosens his tie, swooping it over his head and flinging it. Then he unbuttons his shirt, licking his lips while our eyes meld together in need.

Shrugging out of my jacket, I begin undressing with him, the only sounds in the room the rustle of clothing coming off and our mutual wanton breaths.

"I'm so fucking hungry for you…" he whispers, working on my belt and my pants while I slip out of my dress shirt.

"Please don't stop." I smoosh myself into him, grasping at his hair while my lips graze his throat.

"Don't stop what…?" he rasps. The way his fingers slip my belt slowly through the loops has my dick aching against his.

"Anything… *Everything*," I breathe. "Just don't *stop*, Avi."

“I won’t stop, baby,” he whispers.

My phone makes a noise in my pocket, and I pause sucking and biting on his neck to check it. “It might be Bridget. I just want to make sure she’s feeling okay.”

His eyes are awfully round as he watches me checking the new text. It is from Bridget.

The second I read it, the whole world slows down, clucking and chugging like an engine running out of fuel.

Fear grips the inside of my chest as my eyes slowly slide back up to Avi’s.

He’s really gnawing on his lip, though he pauses it long enough to mumble, “Is it… her?” My head moves in a subtle nod. “What did she say…?”

He’s staring at me, eyes shimmering something I’ve never seen on him before. Something I never wanted to see on him…

Something I’ve only ever seen from a handful of people.

Oh my God… He fucking knows.

He knows.

My legs want to give out, knees rattling and my fingers shaking as I manage to croak the words, “She said… I’m sorry for telling Avi.” My jaw tightens and my gaze drops back to the phone to read her text, word for word. “Please don’t blame him. It’s my fault. He deserves to know. I love you so much, Kyran… I just need you to be…” And I pause before breathing the word, “Okay.”

The pressure in my skull is blurring my vision as my phone slips from my fingers onto the floor with a clunk. I back up slowly.

“Kyran… Please,” he says, softly, like someone who’s trying to stop a vicious psychopath from attacking. “Let’s just talk about this. We can talk about it…”

“Talk about what…?” I mumble, covering my face with my hands, backing up farther. “There’s nothing to… talk about.”

My legs hit the couch, and I crash down onto it. Avi stomps over, kneeling on the floor before me. But I can’t look at him.

I don’t want to.

“Baby, just hear me, okay? Hear what I’m saying…” His hands grip my thighs, and he rubs them with his fingers. “This changes nothing. *Nothing* is different between you and me. I just… I just care about you, that’s all.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about…” I whimper into my palms, breathing lies all over the lines of my roadmap.

“Kyran, I’m *sorry*,” he gasps. “I’m sorry I found out from Bridget, and not from you. Baby, I understand why you didn’t want to tell me, but I’m trying to tell you that it doesn’t matter. I just love you, and I want you to feel safe with me.”

My hands whip away from my face fast and I glare at him. “Why wouldn’t I feel *safe* with you?? Are you fucking serious?! So what, just because… You *think* you know about something my sister told you happened, that means now I’m some fragile, wounded child?!”

He blinks, stunned, like he has no idea what to say.

I hate this. I fucking hate this!

This! This *is why I didn’t want him to know, God-fucking-damnit!*

Because now he’s looking at me like that.

“I used the wrong words,” he mumbles, shaking his head. “I fucked up. Okay? That wasn’t what I meant. I meant that I want you to feel comfortable talking to me. If you want to! Only if you want to. That’s it…”

My head won’t stop shaking back and forth, my eyes finding anything in the room to look at other than his face.

“Baby, listen to me…” Avi crawls up onto the couch, straddling my hips. Sitting on my lap, he grasps my face, forcing my eyes to his. “I *love you*, Kyran. I love you so fucking much, and that is never *ever* going to change. No matter what happens, no matter what I learn about you… Baby, you’re it for me. You’re the only person I’ve ever loved this way. Do you know how special that makes you??”

The thickness is my throat is making it hard to swallow. My mind is racing with thoughts of what he must be thinking… What my sister must have told him.

I don’t know what details he knows, or how much she said, but either way, it’s too much. I feel like a fucking *idiot* for thinking I could be happy, in a relationship with someone…

I should’ve known. *I don’t deserve to be happy with him.*

“Kyran,” he hums, and I blink hard. “Talk to me. Just tell me you’re okay…”

“Stop treating me different,” I whimper with tears threatening to push out of my eye sockets. “Stop… looking at me. I don’t want you to see how broken I am…”

“You are *not* broken.” He shifts on top of me, his movements almost panicked with how badly he’s trying to prove this to me. “You are the most badass person I’ve ever met. Are you kidding me?? You just won the fucking Rose Bowl. *You* did, Kyran Harbor. You just came out in front of your entire team, like a boss. No fucks to give. If you’re broken, then we should all be so fucking broken, because goddamn, Kyran… you’re incredible.”

My heart is jumping like crazy. I want to believe what he’s saying… I *want* to.

But now that I know he knows, it’s like *everything* has changed. I can’t stop feeling like he’s coddling me now, and I *hate* it.

This is my curse, my infinite burden that fucking scumbag saddled me with. As if it wasn’t enough… What he did to me. And now I have to walk around like this for the rest of my life, either holding in the truth, or worrying that the people who know will look at me like a victim.

I don’t know what to do, so I nod slowly, swallowing and swallowing like I’m afraid I might throw up.

“Babe… are you here with me?” Avi whispers, brushing his fingers through my hair.

I nod again. But I can’t speak.

“I love you,” he breathes, sealing himself to me with his lips in my ear.

Our chests bump together, and it moves my dick, reminding me of how badly I wanted to be naked with him before my stupid fucking past popped up to ruin it all.

Avi’s tongue grazes my earlobe, and then he sucks it between his lips, humming as his erection drags on mine through our pants.

“Tell me what you want right now…” He writhes into me. “Anything in the fucking world, and I’ll do it for you, gorgeous.”

Can you turn back time, Aviel??

I’m so fucking torn up. Part of me is devastated, but the other part just wants that luscious sex only he gives me… so badly I can’t even think.

“Can we… go into the bed?” I ask, forcing myself past it, fighting to ignore the truth hanging over us like a raincloud.

He nods, and slides off of me, taking me by the hand. He pulls me to stand, walking us over to the bedroom of his hotel suite, only letting go to shove his pants down his legs.

Crawling into the bed, he kneels, in nothing but his black boxer briefs, looking so fucking sexy, my dick is pushing against the front of my dress slacks. Avi slides his tongue over his full, pink bottom lip, watching me tentatively step closer until I'm at the edge of the bed. Then his fingers slowly push my already unbuttoned pants down over my ass, marveling at the jockstrap I'm wearing… The gift he gave me for Christmakkah.

I can't even enjoy it… because I'm too up in my head.

I sniff, swallowing back the emotion and the doubt, working up the strength to ask him, "What did Bridget tell you… exactly?"

Avi's face springs up to mine, giving me a nervous look while I remove my shoes, then step out of my pants.

"Babe, we don't have to do this…" he says calmly.

My teeth grind together. "Just say it, Avi. *Say* the fucking words."

Avi looks like an Avi I don't know. Sad, angry, uncomfortable… So many things that aren't the Avi I fell in love with, and it's destroying me. *I* did this to him.

I ruined him with my truth.

The mound is his throat bobs before he murmurs, "She told me about the time she found you in the bathroom when you were twelve…"

My brows zip together, and I swallow a whimper. I can *see* that day… I can still see it, as if it just happened five minutes ago.

I'd gone through that entire morning and afternoon in a fog. My body was achy in different places, but I barely even noticed it because I felt numb. Like a lifeless husk shuffling through the day.

We'd packed up and left camp, and my friend Rob's mom gave me a ride home. I went upstairs, stripped down, and immediately went into the bathroom. I turned the shower on and stared at myself in the mirror for minutes. But I didn't recognize myself.

This isn't you…

This is not your body.

Who is this person??

When I got into the shower, everything started to swim and I guess I passed out for a second, which is what sent Bridget bursting into the room.

She got me dressed, and brought me to her bedroom. It smelled like that candle…

The Avi candle.

She wrapped me in her comforter, and held me while I shook, and whispered…

“Something happened.”

“Kyran.” Avi slips his fingers through mine, bringing my hand over his heart. “Remember what I said, okay? You can tell me whatever you want, or you can not tell me shit. We can lie here in this bed together, or you can take my body and use it in any way you want to. We can order sushi, or we can watch *The Departed*… I’m telling you, *I love you*, Kyran Harbor. *Anything* in the world that you want, I will give to you. But not just right now… *Always*.”

My heart swells, pumping through its weak, diseased parts at the sheer love of this man. This man who is technically my family… But who loves me in a way my own family never has. And then some.

He loves me like a brother, and a friend. He loves me like the boyfriend I never thought I could have, because I thought it was wrong.

Avi Vega is *everything* I’ve ever needed…

I just wish I couldn’t tell that he sees me differently now.

Kneeling on the bed, I grab his face and kiss him slowly, reclining and pulling him on top of me. Avi sinks into me, settling his big, warm body between my legs and grinding his cock on mine through the material of both of our underwear.

I want him so badly right now. All I want, in the world, is for him to fuck me the way he has been. *Like the fans are watching…*

Our kisses are heating up, greedy mouths and curious tongues tempting and teasing as he slides his boxers down and kicks them off. He peers between us to admire the sight of me in the jock, my hard dick straining and pushing against it. His fingers slip over my cock, gripping and squeezing it while I mewl.

“I missed this big, sweet cock,” he rumbles into my mouth. “So huge, the jock can barely contain you, baby.”

I whimper while he continues to play with me, teasing my erection until my hips are lifting for more. Avi tugs the material aside, freeing my eager cock. Then he presses his up to mine. And when our dicks touch, we both groan, Avi’s hand circling them and jerking them together.

“Such a thick, beautiful cock,” he sighs, fingers playing with the skin around my head. “I missed how it leaks for me when I do this…”

He uses his thumb to tease my tip every time it pushes out, and I shiver, pulses of precum dripping from me all over his fingers. Using his left hand, he pushes the fat head of his cock up to where mine is peeking out. And then he stuffs it into my foreskin, like he's feeding his cock mine.

His head tips back and he moans, going to town and really rubbing them together, like a seesaw of pleasure before he gives up, leaning down and taking my cock into his mouth.

He's enamored by my uncut cock… I think it's safe to say Avi's always had a thing for it, but the way he stuffs his tongue inside and really swirls it around has my eyes rolling back in my skull. He's almost brutal with how he stretches the skin back with his lips, slinking his tongue in and swirling it around my swollen head, sucking and sucking like he wants to get his whole mouth inside.

My toes are curling, fingers lacing in his hair while he grinds his dribbling cock all over my thigh. "Avi… B-baby…"

"Talk to me, gorgeous," he rasps in between spearing his tongue into the skin around my crown. "Use your filthy mouth to tell me how you want it."

"Ffuck…" My back arches, feeling an orgasm coming on already. So I stop him by yanking his hair. He pops off my dick with a groan. "I want your cock in me… *Please*."

"Yea?" He sits back, flipping his mussy hair over to one side. "How?"

Reaching over to the nightstand, he picks up a tube of Astroglide, gazing down at me while my chest shudders.

"Push it in slow," I whisper, and he bites his lip, soaking his fingers and rubbing it all over his dick. My eyes are stuck on this long, swollen piece of him as I rumble, "I want to feel the curve of that plush pink head on every inch of my insides… All those veins. Let my ass swallow them whole."

Avi's eyes fall shut, and he releases a shivering breath. Parting my legs wide, I lift my hips a bit, offering him my body, because I want him to have it. I need to make sure he knows… I'm his. Because I *want* to be.

"Baby, you are so beautiful," he breathes, rushing his hands up my thighs, then my hips, caressing all the muscles in my torso. He grabs my hips hard, dragging me closer to him. I gasp, and he growls, kneeling between my legs and grinding into me so that our balls are rubbing together. He falls over me, kissing my lips while he positions his cock between my cheeks through the opening in my jock. "Nothing has ever made me has hard as knowing I get to fuck you, Kyran Harbor."

Lashes fluttering, I tip back while he kisses and nips my throat, our bodies pressed together as he stuffs his slick cock up to my ass, nudging gently.

“Let me in this sweet, tight hole, baby,” he breathes, and I whimper. My hands are all over his shoulders and in his hair, and he grabs one, lacing our fingers. “You love me, don’t you?”

“I love you so much,” I choke, relaxing just enough for him to tunnel inside.

And I purr out a shaky sound, intoxicated by the burn of him entering me.

“Oh *fuck*, Kyran, feel it…” he rasps, pushing in more, slowly, just like I asked, stretching my body open for him. It’s *euphoric*, the way he lights my entire body on fire like the stroke of a match. “Feel my dick loving your ass…”

“Mmmffuuuck, Avi… *Yes*. Yes, baby, your dick is… good.” I have no idea what I’m even saying, all I know is that *this* is exactly what I’ve been missing.

He does that sexy, throaty chuckle, swiping his tongue over my lips. “It’s a good dick?”

I nod fast. “A *very* fucking good dick…”

Since the last time we were together, all I’ve thought about was doing this again. In fact, every second of every day since the first time he fucked me, all I’ve wanted was to feel him in me like this… Pumping me full in that painful stab of ecstasy that brushes on my sensitive spot and sends waves of booming thunder through my loins.

He’s barely halfway in and I feel like I could come. Because I do love this feeling… Whether I’m supposed to or not, I don’t care. It’s a wholeness, completion. *I’m complete when he fucks me in the ass.*

Avi is groaning and gasping above me, giving it to me slow, feeding me his inches with hair hanging in his face. I lift my free hand and hold his jaw, tugging his mouth to mine so I can cry his name between his sweet, soft lips.

He makes it all the way inside, the warm skin of his pelvis, with that sexy V of muscles tapping against my balls where he has them hanging out of my underwear. And my head flickers something at me… an awareness, floating back to the surface.

But I shake it away quick, biting down on his lower lip. “Only you, Avi…”

“You’re only *mine*, Kyran Harbor,” he whispers back right away, shifting his hips to lance my prostate with that burning hot, rock-solid muscle.

My entire body shivers. My stomach clenches, and my toes curl in my socks.

“Uhhmmfuck, fuck fuck *fuck*…” I sputter as my dick shoots off and I start coming.

Already. After like two seconds.

“Oh, baby, that’s so sexy.” He moves his hips just enough, letting me clench on his cock over and over while my dick sprays cum between us. “You can’t help but come with my cock in you, huh, love? You come so good with me in you…”

“K-keep g-going,” I stutter, slapping my hand onto his ass. “Keep fucking me. Make me c-come again.”

Avi growls, dropping his mouth onto my throat, biting and sucking while his hips move, stroking his dick in me as the high from an unexpected orgasm fizzles off. It feels like too much at first. I’m sensitive all over, my cock softening a bit while he ruts into me.

But his thrusts build me back up. His mouth trails down to my chest and he sucks on my nipples, licking up all the cum he can reach.

“As if you think I can’t.” He picks up the pace with a salacious curve to his lips. “I’ll make you come so many times you won’t be able to walk tomorrow.”

“Fuck, *Avi*,” I whine out hoarsely, lifting my hips so he can really pound me. “Baby, I love how you fuck me. Fuck me forever…”

“You drive me crazy, gorgeous thing,” he grunts, pace steadily increasing with each drive until he’s rocking into me so hard the mattress is moving. “I’ve never wanted anything as much as I want you always…”

My dick is already filling back up quick, stiffening and swelling at the feel of his abs sliding on it. Lifting my hips, I wrap my legs around his waist and cling to him. Our bodies are sweating together, muscles straining, grunts and groans and the slapping of his skin against mine serenading us in salacious music.

My body is winding up again, and judging by the way he’s gripping the comforter and drilling into me, harder and harder, I’d say he’s probably

close to coming himself.

His forehead drops to mine, our lips hovering.

“Avi…” I purr his name.

“Kyran,” he whimpers like he’s about to burst.

“I want more…” I take his hand and move it down. “In my ass. I want even more of you in me…”

“You’re so fucking hot, baby,” he whispers, slowly sliding his fingers down to where we’re joined. “You mean here…?”

I nod fast, going out of my mind with need. I just want so much *more* right now, and I can’t even understand it. I want his entire body inside me.

“If it hurts, tell me to stop,” he breathes, tracing a circle around his cock as it stretches me open.

But I think I want it to hurt. I want more of the burn, and I want it from him. *He’s the only one…*

Avi grabs the lube and squirts more onto his fingers, then mumbles, “Relax your muscles, baby…”

My head is spinning off my body as he touches his dick with his wet fingers, teasing where he’s sliding in and out. And I love him even more now for how he’s just being *Avi*.

He’s not different. He still loves me, and he’s not going soft on me. He’s giving me what I want, just like he said he would.

Avi’s fingers nudge at me, trying to sneak inside with his cock. But it’s not immediate. Not even close. It takes some going, and even then, it doesn’t seem like it’s going to work until he leans back, lifting my hips up even higher so that my ass is resting on his thighs.

My legs are up in the air, calves on his shoulders. It’s kind of the most vulnerable position I’ve been in with him… Having my feet up by his head.

But then he tilts his face left and kisses my calf. And something about it mollifies me. The way he’s so intimate, even when we’re fucking dirty like this… it has me melting.

And then his fingers slip inside me. Two of them. With his dick.

“Ohh… *oh fuck*, Avi. B-baby…” I whimper, and he groans, kissing my leg some more.

“Goddamnit… fuck that feels incredible. You like being stuffed full of me, baby?”

“Yea… *fuck* yea. *More*…”

“More?”

“One more…”

“Okay… One more in your warm, tight cunt.”

“Fffuck! Avi, fuck me…” I’m choking, screaming, panting, and being way too loud.

His fingers stretch me open wide while his dick pumps in and out, driving my next orgasm right up to the surface.

“I’m gonna come in you, Ky,” he whines, gripping and pulling the elastic waistband of my jockstrap with his free hand as he moves in steady thrusts between my legs. “I’m gonna fill you deep…”

“Breed me,” I gasp.

And that’s it. *Game over for Avi.*

His eyes flutter shut, gnawing on his lower lip to keep in his sobs. I feel him bursting inside me, his dick swelling and throbbing as he pumps his cum deep into my body.

I fucking *love* watching him come… The way his muscles constrict and the way his lips shiver while he’s singing my name… The way his hips slow just enough for it to really feel like he’s working it out into me.

“You’re so fucking sexy,” I whisper, and he pulls his fingers out of my ass, prompting a gasp from my lips.

They’re all slick and shiny with lube, and his cum. And he brings them up to my cock, curling his fist around my erection and stroking me with the slow pumps of his hips.

“Come again for me, baby. I need you to… come again.” He falls over me, kissing my lips.

“I’m almost… th-there.” I kiss the words into his mouth, and he groans.

“Say it first, Kyran.”

“I… I love you,” I whimper, moving my hips forward and back, fucking his fist and riding against his dick, chasing my next orgasm that’s *so fucking close*. “I love you, Avi Vega.”

“Mmm… I love you so hard, Kyran Harbor.”

The climax rushes up. It crests, and it breaks, sending me tumbling once more. My dick shoots more cum onto my abs while Avi strokes it out, collapsing onto me as we breathe and hold each other, hearts hammering through our chests.

I’m warm. Warm everywhere… And tranquil, in a way that only Avi can make me.

See? This is *specific to him.*

He is the *only* one. He's the first, and the only.

Shaking away my lingering uncertainties, I watch Avi with sleepy eyes as he pulls out of me, massaging my legs and my hips, gazing hypnotized at what I'm guessing is his cum dripping out of my ass. Then he eases himself down onto the bed by my side with a hum, wrapping his arms around my waist to pull me into him.

"Another mess?" I breathe, nestling up to his front, pressing soft kisses on his sternum.

He chuckles. "You know we're very messy." An easy grin settles on my lips while his fingers brush through my hair. "Kyran… Today was incredible, baby. Being with you is like a dream come true, and I mean that."

The high from our sex is covering us like a shimmer of diamond dust, and I just want it to stay like this. *I don't want to ever lose this with him.…*

He peeks at me. "Do you believe me?"

There's hesitation. I can't help it, it's just there. It's the insecurity of knowing that he knows just how scarred I am. And I can't fucking stand the nagging thought that won't fucking go away…

He thinks he wasn't really your first.…

"Kyran, please…" His eyes shine with desperation. "Please don't think this changes anything. It doesn't. You're *mine,* baby. I'm not giving you up, ever. No matter what."

I nod subtly, believing him. Something's shifted, I know it has. But it hasn't stopped him from loving me, and I need to find solace in that.

"I really love you, Avi." I kiss the truth onto his smooth skin. "I hope you know that."

"I do," his voice rumbles into me while he takes my hand. "I know."

"Seriously," I hum, peering up at him. "All you've ever done is open the door for me over and over… This broken, crumbled mess. And every time, you pull me in and sit there trying to glue me back together. And you didn't even know why I was smashed to bits in the first place." I shake my head, resting my cheek over his heart. "You're like…"

"A masochistic Bob the Builder?" he rumbles, and I snort a laugh.

"Avi…" I start speaking, but my voice dries up in my throat when I see him, staring down at me with the most beautiful color of shining love in his eyes.

I know that he's serious. That he loves me no matter what, and maybe he always will.

Maybe we could go the distance. Have a future… We're still young, but it's not impossible. And nothing would make me happier than to *try* with him.

But he doesn't deserve uncertainty. He doesn't deserve doubt. He doesn't deserve to be handed the same broken pieces over and over again.

He deserves a *whole* person to love. Not someone who's terrified of even speaking the truth to him.

I *want* to… I want to be able to cough up the words. To confide in him, like he said.

Avi, he… He…

But I can't even say the words in my mind. *How am I ever going to say them out loud??*

The most I can get out is his name. "Avi…"

And he blinks his pretty eyes at me, long, dark lashes fluttering in wait.

But still… I'm only just putting my shoes on. Never making it out the door.

So I whisper, "I love you." Because it's the only truth I can get out right now.

And Avi takes it, because he's sweet, and sincere, and he *loves* me.

I feel him falling asleep with his lips in my hair, his calming breaths lulling me, just like my sister's did that day, the same scent enveloping me.

I'm in a place I never thought I'd be… Comfortable, *finally*, with my sexuality. Avi is the one who helped me get there. *My biggest fan.*

I've finally stopped running from it… from him, and his love.

It might be time that I also stopped running from myself.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Smooches13: Pleaseee bring back the OF! Dying w/o you n Not_Your_Baby!
Hunt3rboiiii: Hey Backwardz, is Not_Your_Baby your bf??? You need to wife that ASAP
Jello_jiggle: Ur fans miss u!

When my eyes peel open, I have absolutely no idea where I am or what time it is.

Damn hotel blackout curtains.

Sprawling out in bed, I stretch my arms and yawn, nestling into the softness of the sheets and the cozy comforter. But as awareness dawns that I'm alone in bed, I feel around for the smooth skin and muscled limbs of my boyfriend, only to find nothing but more bed.

I glance at the empty space, sitting up slowly and peering around the dark room. I don't see or hear him anywhere.

"Ky?" I call out, hopping out of bed to go check the bathroom. "Kyran?"

The door is open and he's clearly not in there. Spinning back toward the living room, I notice that his clothes are gone. Which means *he's* gone.

My chest instantly tightens, but I force myself to take a breath and calm down.

Don't overreact. He probably just went to get breakfast with the team… Or maybe he's in his room packing.

The clock on the nightstand says it's nine-thirty, which is certainly later than I've ever known Kyran to sleep. He's an early riser.

He also likes to be packed and ready to go hours before a flight. His is at one-thirty, and mine is at three. I was planning to go to the airport with him

so we could spend more time together, since I couldn't get on the same flight.

He's probably just in his room changing, or with Guty or something.

Checking my phone for a text that I'm sure is there, my stomach falls a little when I find no new messages.

I type one to him while rushing into the bathroom.

Me: Hey babe! Where are you?

Me: Did you already eat or should I order us some romantic room service? Ya know… heart-shaped pancakes, whipped cream and strawberries, the whole shebang ;)

My eyes are on the screen the entire time I'm brushing my teeth… Almost three minutes and no reply. He hasn't even read the messages.

Now I'm starting to worry just a tad.

I decide to put showering on hold until I figure out where he is, jumping into some clothes and dashing out of the room. The team rooms are two floors above mine, so I stalk up to the elevator, pressing the button a dozen times rapidly.

This is stupid. Why are you freaking out?? He's probably with—

"Guty," I breathe his name when the elevator doors open and I find him standing there in his workout gear, all sweaty.

Guty grins. "Sup, bro?" His eyes narrow as he murmurs, "Have a fun night? I'm guessing you did, since neither of you showed up to hang out…"

I'm not even really listening to him, I'm too busy peering inside the elevator for any sign of Kyran before stepping inside with him. "Yea, it was great. Was Kyran at the gym with you?"

His forehead creases. "No… I thought he was with you."

My breathing picks up. "He was last night, but when I woke up, he was gone. I just figured he was with you."

Guty's eyes widen nervously. "I haven't seen him since you guys took off last night."

Sucking in a breath to calm my racing pulse, I pull my phone out of my pocket. *Still hasn't even read my texts… What the fuck is going on??*

"It's fine. He's probably in the room right now," Guty says as the elevator doors open, and I dive out into the hall. "He probably showed up to pack while I was working out."

"I hope so…" I whisper, anxiously following him to his room.

My heart is climbing high up into my throat, a feeling of mortal dread attempting to take over my body as Guty opens the door to their room and we both storm inside.

“Ky?” I call out, looking all around everywhere. “Kyran??”

“Yo, Nueve, you here, bro??”

But he’s not. He’s *not here.*

“Okay, I’m freaking out…” I rake my fingers through my hair.

“It’s fine. Relax. Maybe he’s with Theo.” Guty taps on his phone screen, and it starts ringing. He peeks at me. “You tried calling him?”

“I texted him…” I mutter, chewing on my lip. “He hasn’t even read them yet, and it’s been like twenty minutes.”

Guty gives me a look that isn’t making me feel any better.

“Yo,” Theo’s voice comes over the speakerphone.

“Hey, are you with Ky?” Guty asks him.

“No…” Theo says in a bemused tone. “I thought he was with Avi.”

I’m pacing in circles while Guty tells him, “Avi can’t find him.”

There’s some shuffling over the line, and Theo whispers something I can’t make out.

“Are you in your room?” Guty asks.

“Yea… I mean, no. I went for a run now I’m… getting coffee.” he mumbles something again, like he’s covering the phone while talking to someone else.

“Dude, what the hell are you doing??” Guty barks at him.

“Nothing! I’m fine,” Theo grunts. “I haven’t seen Ky, but I’ll call you if I do.”

Guty rolls his eyes, pacing the same sorts of circles that I’m making while he mutters, “Okay, yea. Thanks.”

He hangs up the phone, then rubs his eyes. And when his hand moves away, he’s blinking at something.

“What??” I ask, jittering from head to toe.

“His stuff is gone…” Guty stomps over to one of the beds. He bends, looking around, opening drawers and tossing stuff around. “His bag, everything. It’s gone.”

What the fuck?? Why would his stuff be gone?!

“Jesus,” I grunt, shaking fingers unlocking my phone and placing a call to Kyran.

It goes straight to voicemail.

“Fuck,” I whimper, covering my face.

This can’t be right. Why would he leave…??

“Did you guys fight or something??” Guty asks, and my eyes dart in his direction.

“No, everything was…” My words trail as I recall last night. What *really* happened… “Fine.”

Yes, we had a stressful night, what with the revelation of Kyran’s past finally being exposed. But it seemed like everything was okay. I assured him as best as I possibly could that I *love* him no matter what, and that he can talk to me if he wants to. Then we had amazing, hot, sweaty, filthy sex, and he fell asleep in my arms.

I thought we were okay. I know this will be hard for him, since he’s so used to stuffing it all down and hiding it from the world, but I really thought he processed what I was saying… That I’ll be here for him, *always*, for whatever he needs.

God, this is fucked. Where is he??

Typing out another text, I hit send.

> **Me: Baby... please just tell me you’re okay. Your stuff is gone from your hotel room and I’m really freaking out. I love you Kyran... please.**

“You really never saw him grab his stuff?” I ask Guty, scrolling through my contacts.

Guty appears beyond concerned as he shakes his head. “He must have gotten it while I was at the gym. Or maybe while I was asleep… I don’t remember if it was there when I woke up or not…”

Fear of the unknown has me twitching all over as I locate Bridget’s number and press call. *Maybe he went to see his sister…*

He had to have. He has *to be with her.*

“Hello?” Bridget’s voice comes over the line, with a lilt of confusion, because I don’t think she has my number stored yet.

“Hey, Bridget, it’s Avi.”

“Hey,” she sighs, remorsefully. “Look, I’m sorry for just taking off last night. All that emotional shit got the best of me, and I just needed to be alone…”

“Okay, that’s fine, but… is Kyran with you?” I ask her, pleading inside that he’s there.

He has to be there.

Bridget is quiet for a second before she says, “No. Why…?”

“Fuck,” I huff, heading for the door, shouting to Guty on my way out, “I’m gonna go back to my room and see if maybe he came back.”

Guty nods, stuck on his phone, his fingers tapping away.

“Avi, what’s going on??” Bridget demands over the line while my feet move on autopilot, bringing me back downstairs to my room.

“Kyran’s gone,” I whisper.

And saying the words out loud feels like eight tons of wet cement dumped on top of me.

He’s gone. He *left*.

Why would he leave?? Did I do something?

Did I make him leave…?

“What do you mean *gone*?!” she gasps. “What happened?”

“I don’t fucking know.” Emotion clogs my throat. “He found out that I know about what happened… Because of your text.”

“Sorry…” she squeaks.

“It’s okay, because it doesn’t matter. That’s what I told him, I *pleaded* with him to understand that I don’t care about any of that! I just want to be here for him. I want to be with him!”

I burst into my hotel room, desperate to see him standing there, giving me a look like I’m crazy for freaking out so bad over nothing.

But the room is empty.

“Bridget, I gotta go,” I whimper. “Please call me if you hear from him.”

“Yea. You too.”

Taking a slow seat on the couch, I stare at my phone screen, praying to any and all forces of the universe for him to just read my texts.

Me: Baby where are you...? I just wanna know that you’re safe. I love you so much

Far too many minutes go by, and as much as I’m scared and panicking inside, I’m too exhausted to even move.

My phone vibrates in my hand, and I jump in relief.

But it’s not Kyran. It’s a text from an unknown number.

Unknown: Hey it’s Guty. I got your number from Bea.

Unknown: Coach just got a message from Kyran... He went home.

I gape at the message until my eyes ache with the need to blink.

Me: He went home?? Why????

Guty: We're not sure. All he said to Coach was that he changed his flight and went home.

I'm trying so hard not to read too much into this… Not to let my mind go to the worst possible conclusion…

But it's no use. It just keeps crawling up from the back of my brain, the insecurities and tormented voices becoming too loud to ignore.

He left you.

He ran away again… From you.

Because, as usual, you pushed too hard. You're just too much*… Too hopeless, too desperate. Chasing him over and over again, when he doesn't want to be caught.*

Reclining onto my side, I sink into my own despair.

But why would he tell me he loved me?? Why would he openly kiss me in front of his whole team and tell them all that he's my boyfriend if he was just going to turn around and run from me??

My heart aches at the memory of last night… *God*, it was incredible. Kissing him out in the open. Feeling the shackles fall from him; from both of us. We finally became real in that moment.

It wasn't a secret anymore.

I finally had a boyfriend…

Kyran Harbor was *mine*.

But that was before he learned that I knew the truth about his past… And no matter how much I tried to convince him that it changed nothing, I could feel him pulling away. Resisting, because he thinks he's broken.

He's fucking *not*. And even if he is, *so what??* I'd still do everything in my power to fix him, to make him mine. Because I just want him, broken or not.

I want all his uneven pieces.

It's official…

I'm a mess.

Hours have passed, and still no word from Kyran.

After I got Guty's text, I decided I couldn't possibly just sit around and wait for my flight, so I went to the airport to see if I could get on an earlier one.

I did… The one-thirty. Kyran's original flight.

I'm guessing I got his seat. Awesome.

Flying home next to Guty and Theo only would have been fun if Kyran was with me. But since he's not, and I'm now living with the knowledge that he *left me* and actively doesn't want to speak with me, it's pretty much the most awkward thing ever.

I can feel all of Kyran's teammates watching me as I settle in my seat by the window and the plane takes off, likely speculating about how someone could go from kissing and coming out one day, to being brutally rejected the next.

And not that I want to think about it, because it makes me feel like swallowing my own tongue, but I can't stop overanalyzing every second of our sex last night as some sort of passionate, devastating goodbye.

In the moment, it felt like we were *affirming* something. After not fucking for over a week, between all the fighting, the pushing away and the pulling back in, then the love confession… Being inside him last night felt like we were finally *home*, in the sense that home is wherever we're together and in love.

Last night was the first time we've ever fucked knowing *exactly* how we both feel about each other. Or so I thought.

But now that I'm overthinking, trapped in a metal box thirty-five thousand feet in the air for hours with nothing but my neuroses, I'm remembering all these subtle nuances in Kyran's movements, in his voice and the way he whispered that he loves me…

Was he saying goodbye?

Was me finding out the truth about his past too much for him to bear?

I absolutely loathe that thought. He doesn't need to be alone, pushing down his trauma, and he doesn't need to be made to feel like he's *broken*. He needs to be surrounded by people who love and support him, no matter what.

But we all know Kyran worships control, and now I finally understand why. That miserable, abhorrent experience led him to feel like he has to control every little thing. And I guess that's easier to do when you're alone.

“Dude… I thought you weed smokers were supposed to be mellow,” Guty grumbles at my side, and my face shifts. “If you keep wiggling around like that, I might have to rough you up a bit.”

“Sorry…” I sigh out a long breath. “I’m just… so worried about him.”

“I’m sure he’s fine. Maybe he just needed some space,” he says, and I squint at him. “No offense.”

I rub my eyes. “I didn’t even bring my weed… I gave up smoking for him.”

Guty’s brow cocks. “Really?” I nod. “Wow…”

“I mean, he didn’t *ask* me to…” I mutter. “I just don’t wanna be so blazed I miss out on the high of being with him.”

Guty is staring at me. And Theo, who’s sitting on the aisle, slowly lifts his sleeping mask and turns his head to stare at me, too.

“What?” I sigh, rubbing my eyes.

“That’s so fuckin’ sweet.” Theo blinks, a little pout tugging at his lips.

“How did you even hear me?” I grunt, eyeing his headphones.

“I’m in between songs.” He shifts his body in my direction. “Don’t worry. We’ll help you get him back.”

“Yea.” Guty pats my arm. “When we land, come straight to our dorm with me. Hopefully, he’s there.”

I nod, forcing a small grin to show them that I appreciate it. But inside, I’m not placated. Not even a little.

The idea of showing up at Kyran’s dorm when he’s been deliberately ignoring my calls and texts makes me feel like the biggest clingy stalker who can’t get the hint ever.

Coach Matthews peeks at us between the seats. Theo quickly slumps back in his, covering his eyes with his sleep mask. Guty goes back to the movie he’s watching on his iPad.

And I just turn my face to gaze out the window at the clouds engulfing the plane.

Don’t shut me out, Kyran. Let me love you the way I’m supposed to.

I guess I managed to fall asleep for a few hours, because when I reopen my eyes, we’re landing at Logan Airport. The literal second the captain announces that we can turn our phones back on, I’m switching mine out of airplane mode and *praying* for a response from Kyran.

There isn’t one… But it *does* appear that he’s read my texts.

I swear to God, it feels like there’s a Mack truck parked on my chest.

Guty elbows me. “Hey… So, um… I got a text from Ky…”

He tilts his phone so I can read the message.

> **Nueve: Hey bro… I’m really sorry I dipped out without a word. I just have some stuff going on. But I wanted to let you know before you get back and think I abandoned you… I moved my stuff out of the dorm. I’m leaving school… at least for a few weeks. I need to take some time to deal with my personal shit. Just know that I love you like a brother, man. You’re my best friend in the whole world, Samson, I really mean that. Don’t worry about me. I’ll be fine. Take care of that trophy for me, long-shot.**

The seatbelt around my waist feels like it’s cutting off circulation. Inside the cabin is closing in on me, and I’m choking for air, suffocating.

He left school…?

Moved out of the dorm?

Why would he do that?? What happened, for fuck’s sake?!

Is this all because I found out his secret?? Jesus fucking Christ, if I knew it would make him leave me, I never would’ve even asked Bridget! I would’ve just left it alone and let him deal with it his way, instead of pressing for information and driving him like a high-speed chase right out of my life.

Fuck this… I can’t do this.

I can’t handle this.

The first person I give my heart to, and he runs off with it like a thief in the night.

Guty rubs my back, but I barely feel it. I’m just digging my fingers into my eyes until there are spots in my vision. Partly because I feel a hefty migraine coming on, but also because I don’t want him to see that I might burst into tears.

“Do you want me to… tell him anything?” Guty asks softly. “From you?”

Yea, tell him this is bullshit. That I don’t get it… That I don’t understand why he needs to go—again—when I was fucking begging *him to stay. Again.*

Ask him if he really loves me, then why is he ripping my fucking heart out of my chest??

Of course, I don’t say any of that. I just give my head a somber shake.

Because if Kyran doesn’t want to speak to me, doesn’t want to respond and explain this shit to *me*, then I guess there’s nothing left to say.

Once we're off the plane, I say goodbye to Guty and Theo, ignoring the pitying looks on their faces. I'm outside waiting for my Uber when my phone rings. And naturally, my heart leaps up against my tonsils for a second until I see that it's my mom.

"Hey, Mom," I mumble, pulling my hoodie tighter around me. *Going from seventy-five degrees to fifteen is a nice shock to accompany the rest.* "I just got off the plane… I was gonna call you—"

"Aviel, what is going on??" she barks, sounding worried.

And now *I'm* even more worried.

Oh jeez… Did she hear about Kyran and me kissing from someone?? I totally forgot about all that…

"What… what do you mean?" I play dumb, waving down my Uber driver as he pulls up along the curb.

"Kyran just came to the house and dropped off a bunch of his stuff," she huffs. "He said he's taking a break from school for some personal reasons, and he wouldn't tell me what they were."

My head is spinning as I get into the car, clutching my bag on my lap, a spike in adrenaline causing me to tell the driver, "Hey, is it okay if I change the destination to 538 Summer Street in Somerville? I'll pay you cash for the difference."

The driver nods, fiddling with the navigation on his phone.

"Is he still there?" I ask my mom, my gut bunching up into a knot.

"No, he left," she sighs uneasily, and my eyes fall shut. "And he wouldn't tell me where he was going… Avi, did something happen?? Why would he be leaving school?"

"Mom, I'm coming over," I tell her calmly, though I'm feeling anything but. "We need to talk. Is Tom there?"

"No, he's at work."

"Good. I'll see you in a few."

God, this hurts.

This hurts real damn bad.

I’m upstairs in Kyran’s bedroom, at our house in Somerville… the house that was Kyran’s before it was mine. The house that I moved into, encroaching on his territory.

I used to think he hated me for that reason. Because he didn’t want to share his father’s affections with a new wife and her son, who was infinitely different from him in so many ways. I thought he hated me because I was the opposite of him; poor and artsy, bad at sports, with a love of laughing things off when they get too serious. And maybe that part was true…

Maybe that *is* why he hated me, or at least why he pretended to. Because I remind him of how he used to be. How he *could* have been, if some deranged, disgusting pervert hadn’t stolen his youth.

But being in here now, I don’t feel any of that hate. The memories of him picking on me in school, of us bickering and fighting over the bathroom, of him using his words to hurt me as best he could… they’re not upsetting. In fact, they bring a smile to my lips. Because it’s how we started. As reluctant stepbrothers, before any of the rest of it.

We were *brothers*. And that’s what fills me with sadness, anger, and despair.

The fact that all along, my brother was dealing with something so detrimentally fucked up… And I had no idea.

Picking up one of his sweatshirts, I hold it up to my face and breathe in deep. The smell of him lingering in the fabric is like a sledgehammer to my already broken heart.

I have a candle that smells like you.…

I hear his voice in my head, and I have to stop before I collapse.

The new memories in here are much fresher than the ones of him hating me. Like Christmas Eve. Holding his hand and kissing him, fooling around with him on a bed where I’m sure he used to curse my existence. The night we shared in my room… I can still see him moving on me. I can feel his hands touching me and his lips dragging along my neck.

We became *more* in that moment, without cameras filming or obligations or money on our minds. We fell together in pure passion, and spent the whole night getting to know each other. *Finally*.

After years of being in each other’s lives… that night was when the blinders came off.

When we realized it wasn’t actually for the fans.

“Avi.” My mom peeks into the room, watching me closely. “We should talk. Before Tom gets home.”

Nodding, I toss the sweatshirt down with the rest of his things, following her up the hall to her bedroom. My eyes scan the room, and the one thing that sticks out is a suitcase on the floor. I squint at it, but say nothing, taking a seat next to my mother on the bed.

“You wanna tell me what’s going on?” she asks, her eyes sparkling concern. “Honestly, I feel like you’ve been slipping away from me lately, Aviel. And maybe it’s my fault too… We used to be so close, and now you’re just…” She shakes her head, dropping her gaze to her lap.

I hate making her feel this way. I don’t want her to think I’m hiding things from her. Or that I’m pulling away.

“Mom, I just need to tell you some things,” I start with a breath. “And the reason why I didn’t tell you before is because I was still figuring it out. And it’s… complicated.”

“More complicated than getting kicked out of school for making porn?” She cocks a dark eyebrow, and I huff.

“Okay, *porn* is sort of glorifying it.” I roll my eyes. “It’s an OnlyFans.”

“I don’t know what the hell that means, but if you’re recording videos of you having sex… that’s porn.” She gives me a stern look.

Point well made, Mom.

“So it kinda started with the… porn.” I shift in my seat. “I realized that I think I like guys too…” I shake my head. “I mean, I *know* that I do. Back then I *thought*, but now I *know*. I’m bisexual.”

Exhaling to stop my awkward rambles, my eyes swoop over to my mother, and she’s staring at me, brows raised.

“Okay…” she says, leaning forward. “And?”

“Oh… uh… alright.” I clear my throat. “I just thought you might need to digest that for a second. But I guess not.”

“Aviel, I’m so happy that you’re telling me.” She rubs my arm. “I’m proud of you for being so brave. But it’s not something I would need to process. I just love *you*. Who you love doesn’t matter as long as you’re happy with them.”

I gulp, my lips curving into a soft grin. “Thanks, Mom. I love you too.”

“Are you forgetting that your uncle Elijah is gay?” she asks, blinking at me. “And your father’s brother, Dominic.”

“No, I didn’t forget about Uncle Eli…” I mumble. “But I didn’t know about Uncle Dom…”

“Well, Elijah came out to me when he was fourteen, so I don’t appreciate you thinking I’m some old-fashioned person who wouldn’t understand,” she grumbles like she’s annoyed with me, and I have to chuckle.

“Trust me, Ma, I know you’re not old-fashioned whatsoever.” I grin at her and she smiles back. “But hold that thought, because here’s where it gets a little tricky…”

Her eyes are wide as I take a deep breath and puff out the words.

“Kyran and I have been…” That’s all I get before I pause to clear my throat again. “Together.”

Her brows zip, and she tilts her head. “Really?” I nod. “For how long?”

Biting on the inside of my cheek, I squirm a little. “About three months.”

Watching her face, it looks like a lot of things are dawning on her right now. “So *that’s* why you two have been getting along lately. I should have known something was up! You couldn’t stop staring at each other when you were here.”

“I’m sorry…” I shift to face her. “I know it’s weird because he’s Tom’s son. But I… I just…”

“You love him?” she asks softly, and I nod glumly. “I can tell, sweetheart. I’ve never seen you like this… all torn up over someone. I’ve been waiting for it to happen.”

She’s grinning, looking all excited for me, but I can’t help rolling my eyes.

“Thanks, Mom. I really love feeling this way,” I grunt out the sarcasm.

“Well, what happened? Did you have a fight?”

“No, that’s just it. Everything was going great. He killed it at the game, and then we were at the party afterward and he told his teammates about us. It finally felt like we were a real couple. But then he took off… He left me in California without a word. He won’t answer my calls or texts… and now he’s left school.”

My mom stares at me for a moment, as if she knows I’m holding something back. “Aviel… please be honest with me. Is Kyran the one you’ve been making those videos with?”

My fingers twist in my lap, severe discomfort making me fidgety.

Oh God… This is weird. This is super weird.

I don't want my mom to know Kyran and I have been fucking on camera.

"Avi…" she scoffs and shakes her head. "I really can't with you."

I give her one of my innocent looks, batting my eyelashes. "I swear I didn't do anything too bad, Mama."

"You're too much, son of mine…" she breathes.

"But I'm telling you… if it weren't for making those videos, we might never have…" My voice trails. "I mean, you know he always hated me before. So it was like it… brought us together. And now I *love* him, and I don't know what to do."

"Oh, sweetie." She wraps her arm around me, pulling me into her side. "You know what they say… there's a fine line between love and hate. I bet Kyran was only ever mean to you because he cared for you, and he was scared."

I nod. "I think so…"

"Do you think that's why he left?"

My chest grows tight, and I consider what to tell her. I know it's not my place to share Kyran's secret. That's kind of what got us into this whole mess in the first place. But I'm worried about him…

Plus, my mother is married to his awful father. The guy who brushed off his sexual abuse like it was nothing. *She deserves to know who she's married to.*

"Mom, did Tom ever mention anything to you about why Kyran stopped going to church?" I ask her carefully.

My mother's eyes widen, a nervous glint in them, as if she knows I'm about to tell her something awful.

"No… In fact, he's very secretive about a lot of things," she breathes, her eyes flinging to the suitcase on the floor. "Aviel, I'm leaving him. We're getting a divorce. I just can't handle the secrecy anymore."

Whaaat…? My jaw drops. I didn't expect that.

"He never once kept me in the loop about his financial troubles. And a few weeks ago, I found a statement in his desk drawer, for a trust in Kyran's name. It contains over a million dollars."

I gulp, digging my fingers into my thighs.

"When I asked him about it, he said it was Kyran's money, and that he knows Kyran will never use it, or let anyone else use it. The way he said it

made it seem like he's tried to get Kyran to sign it over to him, but he wouldn't."

My teeth grind together, disdain for this horrendous man slinking through my extremities. "He didn't tell you where the money came from…?"

"No." She shakes her head. "And I'm just sick of it, Avi. This man is not who he portrays himself to be."

"No… He's not." I sigh. "Look, I really can't tell you the details, but I think Kyran left because of something that happened to him… when he was twelve. Something that Tom helped to cover up by denying it and making his own son feel worthless."

My mother's eyes shine with sorrow. "Was it something… bad?" I nod slowly. "Something to do with the church…?" I nod again, and she covers her face. "Dear God…"

Hearing those two words, in this moment… it just rubs me wrong. All the rage I've been stuffing down since finding out the truth rushes right up to the surface.

Shooting off the bed, I glare down at her. "How can you even say His name?? There is no *God*, Mom, don't you get that?! What kind of God would allow something like that to happen… by one of his anointed fucking flock?! It's bullshit!"

I'm heaving for breath while my mom just stares up at me, allowing me to vent it all out. All my confusion, pain, and anger toward this *infinite being* who doesn't give two shits about us.

"God doesn't exist," I seethe. "And if He does, He's pure *evil*. He's a sick, fucked-up excuse for someone who's supposed to love the righteous and condemn the damned. Instead, it's the other way around. Innocent children get tortured by *His* people and he just lets it happen! Forces them to live with it, alone and scared."

My face falls into my hands to cover the tears that are filling my eyes.

And then I feel my mother stand, her arms cradling me, caressing me softly while she shushes my cries. Just like she did when my father died…

When I told her I would never worship any *God* ever again.

"Mom, he's out there… thinking he has to deal with this by himself and he *doesn't*," I whimper. "Your asshole husband made him feel that way. *God* made him feel that way. I love him and I just want him…" I'm sputtering for air; I can barely speak through my choked sobs. "I want him to be okay.

I want him to know he didn't deserve that." I shake my head. "Evil stuff happens to good people because God doesn't care."

"Aviel…" she whispers, brushing her fingers through my hair. "You know that there are many reasons why I left Israel when I was a girl. I've never believed that our religious beliefs do God any kind of justice. Why would they? We're taught from the time we're children to fear God, worship Him no matter what, and take these old texts written by men from thousands of years ago as gospel. It makes no sense.

"Real *faith* should be open to interpretation. But many people don't feel that way. They're the same people who choose sides in wars, the same people who shout about blasphemy and heresy, but then turn around and do awful, deplorable things. Religion has spread more hate in this world than love, and that is one of the saddest things I've ever experienced."

My shoulders shudder as I struggle to breathe, and she just caresses my hair.

"When I was nine, your uncle Elijah left home. I didn't know it at the time, but it was because he was gay, and was experiencing prejudice within the community. So when I was old enough, I left myself and went to live with him. And he used to say a lot of the things I've heard you say just now… About how God hates us, about the hypocrisy and the widespread deception. He used to call organized religion a *cult*. He still does."

She pauses to chuckle fondly. "But one day, when I was sixteen and your uncle was nineteen, we decided to take a boat out. In the Middle East, the weather is purely beautiful in the fall, so we thought it would be fun. Just a small boat, sailing along the coast. We'd done it before.

"Anyway, we were only about a mile out when the engine died on us. We had ores, but still, we were nervous. And then, the rain came. Now, rain is uncommon as it… and the way it was coming down… it was *bizarre*. It was flooding us, waves whipping around. We were sure we were going to capsize. And the storm… it felt like it was *mirroring* your uncle's anger. The way the waves were crashing and sending us tumbling about. The sea was raging the way he had been for years.

"And in that moment, I looked at him. I took his hands, and he held mine. And we didn't speak, but we just knew. We knew that *He* knew. He felt it… our anger and frustration, with our families and the state of things back home. It was shared. He wasn't doing it *to* us, He was living it *with* us.

And as soon as that became known, it felt like the rain was washing it all away… *cleansing* us."

I blink at my mother, inherently skeptical, because it's hard not to be. But I can see in her eyes that this is something she truly believes.

This was a moment that changed her.

"The rain stopped abruptly," she says, her lips curving into a smile. "And when we looked up, all you could see were stars. Millions of them, covering the entire sky." She holds me in close. "Aviel, God is not some old, bearded man sitting up in the sky, punishing us when we're bad. God is *love*, and laughter and light. God is the good things, and the bad. He… *They*, I should say, are the Earth and the stars and the vast openness of an existence we're only a small fraction of."

Tears roll down my cheeks, and she swipes them away with her fingers. "God is *faith*, Avi. Faith in *yourself*, as a part of the world as it turns. And for all the hate, and sickness and despair we experience, there are equal parts love and joy. You just have to look up."

Releasing a heavy breath feels like I'm expelling the negativity inside. I hug my mother tight, letting her console me the way she did when I was boy…

Because she's right. I know she is.

Good people get hurt, bad ones walk free, and things just happen. Chaos within an infinite, spiraling cosmic circus. The only thing we can do is have faith in *us*, find beauty in the pain, and laugh as much as possible.

No matter what Kyran feels he needs to do to get himself past the torment he holds, I won't give up on us. I'll never stop chasing him while he runs.

And hopefully he knows that when he shows back up, I'll always open the door.

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CHAPTER THIRTY

@Backwardz_Avi: I'd give up candy for the rest of my life for one more kiss… He's all the sugar I need.

Kyran

Here's how I know sexuality isn't a *choice*.

When I was eleven, I played peewee football. I was good, even back then, which is what led me to believe if I kept pushing myself, getting better, I could make it to the NFL someday. The dream became tangible the more I played, the more I learned about the game and how to develop a synergy with my teammates.

One of our receivers was a kid named Cody. Cody was also very good for his age. We were young, yes, but there was a distinguishable difference between us and the kids who were playing because their parents didn't want to deal with them and forced them into after-school sports.

That might be part of the reason mine got me into football, but regardless, it turned out to be the best negligent decision they ever made. *But I digress.*

The carefree side I used to have slowly fell away the more I was pushed into the Catholic faith. After I began to *fear* God, my subservience took shape, and even though I hated the image my parents projected to everyone else of our *good Catholic family*, I really tried to do as I was told, while still holding on to my individuality as best I could. Because all I cared about was getting good at football and not being sidetracked by other things. So I followed their rules. I took communion, I served as an altar boy—only a

few times until I begged my dad to let me stop—and I went to church camp. Because I had to.

Where does Cody fit into this? you might be asking… *Well, I'll tell you.*

Cody and I played well together. We had a sort of chemistry that you wouldn't think would apply to peewee football, but for us, it just happened naturally. He was always there for a pass when I needed him, and it wasn't long until we became friends.

One day, after a rousing game in which we schooled Malden Catholic thirty-one to three, we were in the locker room, getting changed. Cody and I were joking around about a few of his catches, and he playfully shoved me.

It was something that happened often; it wasn't new or distinct in any real way. But for some reason, *this time*, his hand lingered a little on my chest before it sort of swooped down and off of my body.

Now, I know this doesn't sound like anything shocking, and yes, I was still pretty young at the time. But apparently, I was old enough for my brain to send a signal to the rest of my body. The receptors that distinguish good things you want more of versus bad things you don't care for pinged to life and told me… *yea. I think I like that.*

That part of me was always *there*. But like a perennial seedling, it only pops up when it's the right time to present itself. And from that point on, my brain began to water and nourish it with thoughts and contemplations.

It was all completely innocent. I was still too young to really be thinking about sex at all, though I knew how it worked and what it was for. But the only sex they ever taught us about was between a man and a *woman*. Sex between two men wasn't something that was supposed to happen, according to our school, and my parents, and the church, and pretty much everyone I knew directly.

And despite the fear of God in me, I couldn't find it in myself to discourage my feelings. Because the way I saw it, God had made me. If he didn't want me to feel excited by a playful shove in the locker room from another boy, then he shouldn't have wired my brain that way. *Simple.*

I spent the next year of my life subtly looking at my fellow students, both boys and girls, in an attempt to figure out if this feeling was real or just a fluke. But the more I did it, the more I was leaning toward verification. I was too young to find interest in expressing my attraction… The thought of actually telling a boy I liked him, or God forbid, *kissing* him, still made me

sort of nervous. But I knew, deep down, that it was what I wanted eventually.

When I was old enough, I would date a boy…

And my parents would hate me for it.

That notion was a little overwhelming, but still, I wasn't devastated by it. I figured that if my parents couldn't see this wasn't something I was choosing for no reason, like deciding on what cereal to have for breakfast, then they clearly didn't love me, nor did they truly understand God's plan.

And honestly, if they thought my attraction to boys was a *choice*, then they were probably pretty stupid, too. My entire upbringing was based on the idea that boys should like *girls*. Being a boy who wanted to be with another *boy*, despite all of those ideals that are drilled into your head from the time you're an infant, would mean there's no *possible way* it's a choice, right?

I mean, who would *choose* something knowing it directly contradicts their biological nature?

Anyway, over the course of that year, I also grew to really hate church and all of its forced activities for us Catholic kids. Because it didn't even feel *real*. It was like almost everyone was just going through the motions. It was an image they wanted for themselves, like a banner that screamed to the rest of the world, *hey, look at me! I'm a great person!* While simultaneously using it as an excuse to be judgmental and sometimes even downright nefarious.

Case in point… the man responsible for my trauma.

Father McAdams.

I never liked being around the man. He'd always given off a yucky vibe, but the problem was that there was no evidence of his wrongdoing. *Not yet, anyway.* It was just a feeling, like when there's a gas leak. You can't see anything, but you know it's there, and you know it's very harmful.

Father McAdams had taken a shine to me, and was always saddling me with new responsibilities, acting like they were *special* and only tasked to the best kids. But really, it was just busy work. Moving things in his office, helping him set up before mass. The only thing that made it slightly tolerable was that a few of my friends were there too, including Cody.

I caught Father McAdams watching Cody and me once, after we'd been talking and joking around, as we did. And the feeling of him staring at me stood all the hairs on the back of my neck on end.

The summer when I was twelve was understandably my last time at church camp. I had already been planning on asking my dad if I could stop going, seeing if maybe there was a football camp or something I could do instead that would be more in line with what I actually *wanted*, and not six weeks spent listening to the same stories being told over and over again by the hive-mind of our counselors.

It wasn't unusual for some of the local parish priests to make appearances at camp, for special services and whatnot. But when Father McAdams showed up on the last night to observe our youth prayer circle, I knew right away something didn't feel right.

He'd been coming at me more and more lately with all the things I now recognize as *grooming*, in a way. Paying special attention to me, offering me things, trying to get me alone. It was easier to rebuff when other people were around.

But on that last night, he managed to corner me when I was alone.

There are a lot of reasons why it hurts to think about these things… Why remembering it all, and so vividly, causes me an emotional pain so strong I can actually *feel* it in parts of my body; like the way it turns and clenches my stomach, burns like acid in my throat, and triggers stiffness in my knees and my back.

But the main reason is knowing how badly my trauma fucked me up. How far back it set me, mentally.

That man stole the comfort I'd had in myself. The experience stunted my self-awareness. It was like one big explosion that leads to the collapse of an entire city. The abuse, me telling my father and his denial, my family's deterioration… it all buried me, the *real me*, in years of rubble.

I knew who I was, and I was ready to grow into that person. But he *stole* my identity. He, and my father, forced me into shame and remorse that wasn't mine.

And so, like a form of fight-or-flight response, I ran away from the truth and recoiled into the image of a new Kyran Harbor. The straight boy who focused on only school, and girls, and sports, becoming popular as a means of control. A mask to wear, one so believable, even *I* began to feel like it was the real me.

I stuffed my truth down for years, fought against it tooth and nail. Even after Avi and I started our business, I told myself repeatedly that it was just

that; a means to make money. But the whole time, in my bones, I knew it was a lie.

Being with Avi… being close to him, seeing and feeling and breathing with him, all those things we did together… it's what set me free. *He* was the shovel, slowly scooping away the debris to uncover the real Kyran from where he'd been buried alive.

It was never a choice, and I know that now because despite everything I did to cover it up, it *still* came back to me. *I* came back.

I don't want to lie anymore. I don't want to *run* anymore…

Which, *yes*, sounds idiotic coming from someone who's literally running away as we speak. But this time, I'm not running. I'm *driving*.

Driving on new roads, to clear my head and find myself. So that the next time I knock on his door, there won't be a shred of doubt.

The real Kyran Harbor wouldn't be *alive* without Avi Vega.

He's my reason, my rescue.

Slow down, broken boy… and let him catch you.

What a difference a week can make…

When I left Somerville, after packing up my stuff and moving out of the Walsh dorms at BC, I wasn't really sure what I planned to do. All I knew was that I needed to get away and prepare myself for some major internal reorganizing.

I knew I wanted to be alone for a while—*at first, anyway*—to get my thoughts together before the next part of my plan. So I rented a Mercedes SUV for the drive, just like the one I got when I took Avi to the drive-in. And no, that's not a coincidence.

I wanted to feel closer to him throughout this process, knowing full-well I'd be forcing myself to ignore his calls and texts the entire time.

It's been *killing* me not to talk to him… but I know it's necessary.

Getting the real Kyran back is work I need to do *myself*. I can't put it all on Avi. Sure, in many ways, he saved me, and I want him to know that. I hate the idea that he might think I left because I don't love him… I *do*. His

love is what's kept me driving when so many times I thought about turning back; giving up on this mission to fix myself and just going back home.

But I don't want to return to him half-hearted. Because the real Kyran is still a stubborn control-freak in a lot of ways. He's a determined motherfucker. Sets his mind to something and makes it happen.

No more hiding. No more doing what I think will look the best.

When I come back to Boston, it'll be because I'm ready to face the world as me.

Gay. In love with my stepbrother. Sexual assault survivor. Football quarterback. *Okay, that one didn't change. But now I'll be doing it for myself, instead of as a means to make my father less disgusted by me.*

For the first few days on the road, I just drove. I wasn't going anywhere in particular, just clearing my head and deciding on my next move. And a lot of it was intense, but also cathartic. I kept the music off and just cruised the streets with my own thoughts. I let the stuff out that I never think about, and when things got heavy enough, I spoke the words out loud.

I cried. I laughed. I screamed. I pulled over a few times to get my bearings before I drove myself into a tree.

But as torturous as it was at times, I came out of it feeling a lot better.

It prepared me for the next part of my plan.

Two days ago, I ended up at a hotel near the Berkshires, which is a quaint and quiet place, especially in winter. I remember coming here on a camping trip when I was little. It was a lot of fun, and thinking back on the solitude of the mountains made me wish Avi was here even more.

We'll have to go camping here in the spring.

That is, if he's not still mad at me for leaving.

I have to assume that when Avi finds out how much good I'm doing for myself, he'll understand. He's always been that way, after all. He's patient and caring, loving and supportive. Everything I need from my real family. And everything I need to understand why my *actual* family couldn't give me that.

Settled in my room with a bag of fast food as my dinner—*no more football until training camp, so I get to splurge*—I allow myself to decompress from the day.

I had my first honest to God therapy session today, with a nice counselor named Anna. She's very easy to talk to, which I appreciate. It

was the first time I've ever opened up to someone face-to-face, regaling them with the entire story of my abuse.

I talked to someone on the phone my second night on the road, from the RAINN hotline. Honestly, I forget his name, because I was just so wound-up, almost manic, spilling my guts for the first time ever. And I'm talking *all* the details… The ones that still haunt me, coil me with nausea and anger and make me want to retreat into myself.

But I didn't, and I'm proud of that.

It was after that conversation that I almost broke my rule and called Avi. I just want so badly to hear his voice. To tell him what good things I'm doing and hear his smile when he tells me he's proud and he loves me.

But then I don't want it to feel like I'm doing this stuff for his approval… Because I'm not. I'm doing it for me. So that I can have a relationship with him, and share things with him without being scared.

I'm still afraid it'll terrify him. I know it's dumb to think that, because of how supportive he's been. But I just can't help feeling like the *idea* of your boyfriend being sexually abused as a child and the *reality* of the gritty details are two very different things.

I also know that I don't *have* to tell him anything… He made that clear the night before I left. But *I* want to. I don't want to hide or be ashamed of it.

Still, it's like Anna said earlier… it's a work in progress. My own acceptance comes first, and after that, I can worry about my partner's, in however much time that takes.

Hesitantly lifting my phone from where it's been resting on the bed, I power it back on. I've been keeping it off for the most part, because I don't want to be tempted to read Avi's gut-wrenching texts, or answer the phone when he calls. But more importantly, I'm purging myself of the desire to snap miscellaneous pics for Instagram… one of the coping mechanisms that's kept me wrapped up snug in denial for years.

I'm not saying social media is *bad*… It's just not *real*. My entire account was full of pictures I posted to fit the fake image of myself. Shirtless workout pics, smiles and kisses with girls I didn't really care about, sunsets and food… The happy, glamorous life of someone who never even existed.

I deleted them all.

I still have my account, but there are no current posts. Someday I'll post something again… And when I do, it'll be the *truth*.

Imagining posting a picture of Avi and me kissing sends a flutter to my gut, and I bite my lip. *I wonder what he's doing right now…*

Tapping on Instagram, I search for Avi's profile. The one with only a handful of random posts, that I still believe he used mostly to cyber-stalk me. The thought has my lips curling into a smile that feels *really* freaking good.

I miss smiling for Avi. I miss laughing at his dumb jokes, and forcing scowls at him to cover up how truly witty and adorable I think he is.

When I pull up his profile, I find that he changed his name… From **AviVega420** to **Backwardz_Avi**.

I purse my lips. I guess he's just embracing it now… The *Fans*.

As far as I know, his Twitter is still inactive, and so is the OnlyFans. But this name change has me wondering if maybe he'll start it up again, now that he doesn't have school to worry about.

He wouldn't… find a new business partner… would he?

Swallowing down that icky feeling, I scroll over his bio, which just says, *Art is love*, and I find a recent post from yesterday. It looks like a wall of some kind, maybe concrete, spray painted with a black background and a yellow frowning face.

The caption reads:

> ***~~I am alone.~~ I am utterly alone.***

I blink at the screen a few times, wondering why that sounds so familiar… And then I remember. It's from *Beetlejuice*… One of his top five favorite movies ever.

Grabbing the TV remote, I flick around all the available streaming services, searching for *Beetlejuice*. It's on Amazon Prime, so I turn it on, letting it play in the background while I stare at the picture.

I've never known Avi to spray paint, but then he's an artist. He can use anything he wants as his canvas, which I think is pretty cool. I just wish in this one case it wasn't something so depressing.

Swiping Instagram away, I open my text chain with Avi, looking over all the messages he's sent me since I left California. And there are a lot.

Aside from the ones he sent me that day, after I vanished, he's sent me at least three a day for the last week. Everything ranging from…

> **Avi: I love you baby… please come back to me**

To…

Avi: I'm just gonna be honest… I know you're hurting, but it's pretty messed up that you won't even RESPOND to me. *annoyed face emoji*

And even…

Avi: Robin misses you. She just meowed and it sounded like she was saying "Kyran". I'm not even kidding.

The most recent one is just a screengrab from the video of our first makeout session, in Theo's bathroom. But the *actual* video, not the one with my face blurred out.

It squeezes the air out of my chest to see it, sending all the sensations rushing back. I remember how afraid I was… Because of how amazing his mouth felt on mine. I couldn't stop shaking.

The picture captures it perfectly. It's like I'm falling for him, even then, and I both love it and hate it at the same time. *I just wish I hadn't wasted so much time pretending.*

Typing out a text to him, I hesitate for only a second before hitting send.

Me: Hey, baby. I know this might hurt, but push through it for me. I'm fine and safe and I promise I'll be back soon… Knocking on your door for good this time. I love you, angel. Thanks for saving me.

Then I turn my phone off. Because I have to.

"You know that I've seen you… Looking at the other boys."

My knees are sore, and my back is stiff.

"It's alright, Kyran. Don't be afraid. God loves you. He made you this way."

There's a black rosary wrapped around his hand.

The one I dropped when he came into the room and locked the door.

"But you'll need to beg His forgiveness for your lustful ways. I can help you…"

The white cloth of his robe brushes on my face as it lifts.

"This is you, Kyran. This is who you are."

“But I haven’t done anything… I don’t w-want to,” I whisper with fear in my voice.

“God sees everything, you know. He can tell that you’re lying.”

My head shakes, again and again, but he holds it still. The scents of smoke and oil fill my lungs.

“Plead salvation with your body, Kyran. Loud enough that He can hear you.”

My eyes shoot open with my gasp, and I sit up in bed, glancing around the unfamiliar space.

Oh, right. I’m in a new hotel room… back in Boston.

Cambridge, to be exact.

I spent a month at that hotel in the Berkshires, seeing my counselor Anna and working through a lot of difficult stuff I’ve let fester for eight years. And after weeks of rough, emotional reconstruction, I decided it was time to come back to Boston. To do something very important…

Confront my parents.

Anna said I can keep seeing her over Zoom, or she can refer me to someone here, whatever I prefer. I still haven’t decided what to do, but I think I like the idea of sticking with her. Speaking face to face is cool, but I’ve already built a rapport with her. And as nice as the Berkshires are, they’re not *home*.

It’ll be hard to be in the Boston area without seeing Avi. But honestly, I’m really fucking sick of being away from him, anyway.

My trauma will always be with me, no matter where I’m located. It’s a part of who I am, and as I’ve learned in these past weeks, I just have to make room for it inside myself. Work on acceptance, and giving myself the time and space to heal.

I want to do that with Avi.

At this point, the nightmares are already getting less scary. The rage and hopelessness are still there, but I’m learning to cope with it; I think because I’m no longer using all my energy to bury them with denial.

I’ve also been reading a lot, listening to music. I started meditating and doing yoga. The last five weeks have been like a form of rehab, to kick my habits of avoidance, and I finally feel ready to get back to life.

But mostly, I want to get back to Avi. *I miss him like crazy.*

Sliding out of bed, I wander into the bathroom. After splashing water on my face, I gaze at myself in the mirror… and I remember all the times I’ve

done this. When I would stare at the stranger gazing back at me and wonder if I would ever recognize him again.

I don't feel like that same, terrified twelve-year-old boy anymore, struggling to breathe over the knowledge of what had been done to him. Running my fingers through my hair, my lips quirk, because I *finally* look like me again.

And I recognize this person, this real Kyran. I've seen flashes of him before. *With Avi.*

I blink at my reflection. "You deserve better parents. But you're stuck with the ones you have. So you'll go, say your piece, and close that chapter. No matter what happens, you're here. *This* is you."

Hours later, I've showered, dressed, and I'm heading downstairs to meet my parents for lunch. It's almost crazy how difficult it was for me to get them both together in the same room. Even after knowing that I left school and home because I've been struggling so badly, it *still* took several texts and phone calls of convincing.

But eventually, they agreed to come to lunch at the restaurant in the hotel where I'm staying. I reserved a booth in the back for privacy, and it should be fine.

When I walk into the restaurant, the hostess looks up, and I just tell her I'm meeting someone, sauntering by and making a beeline for the back booth. I can see that my mother is already here, but not my dad.

Pausing, I take in a steady inhale, reminding myself that I can't control how other people react to things. I can only control my *own* actions.

"Mom," I murmur politely as I wander over, taking a seat across from her at the table. "It's been a while…"

My mother gazes at me, smiling. Elena Harbor-McLaughlin is still a beautiful woman. Blonde hair, green eyes, fair features. She looks just like she did when she was still actively my mother, just with a few more lines around her eyes, and a sort of vacancy that only really popped up after my confession that tore our family to shreds.

"Kyran, sweetie… I've been so worried about you," she says in her familiar tone, that of a waspy Boston wife with a rich husband. "Since your father's company went under, I've been meaning to reach out to you."

"Then why didn't you?" My head cocks.

She looks momentarily uncomfortable, straightening the silverware on the table. "Kyran, you know it's difficult between your father and me. All

those bad memories…”

Ah, the making Dad out to be the monster routine. I remember it well…

“Mom, it would have been as easy as picking up the phone. Just being *there* for me,” I rumble calmly. “But you weren’t. Not now, and definitely not back then.”

Her forehead lines. “Ky… I don’t…” She pauses to shake her head. “I don’t really know what to say.”

Folding my hands on the table, I lock eyes with her. “Oh, don’t worry. *I* have plenty to say. I needed a *mother*. To protect me, and console me. Tell me everything was okay. But instead, you focused strictly on your shitty marriage and then *disappeared* on me. And *still*, I’m always the one who’s expected to come to you. For holidays and occasions… I mean, *Jesus*. You didn’t even call me when I won the fucking Rose Bowl…”

Shaking my head, I slump back in my seat, the anger and depression over voicing all these truths weaving through my limbs. And I let it.

I don’t try to stuff it down or ignore it. I just sit, buzzing with tension, reminding myself to breathe.

“I’m so proud of you, honey,” she whispers, and my eyes fling up to hers. “I am. I know I haven’t been there for you. But just seeing how well you’ve done… how far you’ve come. No matter how much your father and I screwed up, you still turned into such an incredible man.”

I swallow, my chest swelling at her words. I hate the fact that I have to drag this out of her, and that it’s taken this long to even get it. But at least it’s something.

“I just want to know that you’re okay, Kyran,” she goes on. “Leaving school and taking off like that… it doesn’t seem healthy.”

“But that’s just it, Mom,” I mutter. “I’m *not* okay, and I haven’t been healthy. Not emotionally… That’s why I left. Because sure, it looks like I’m winning on the outside, but inside, I’m still scared shitless.” She cowers a bit, fussing with her hair, likely because she knows where this is going. Leaning forward on the table, I whisper, “It wasn’t all Dad’s fault. You’re *equally* to blame. Because I was abused by someone you both considered a man of God, and you did *nothing*.”

My mother gasps, her hands covering her face. In shame, in remorse, yes. But also, because I know she hates hearing about it. She *still* wants to pretend it never happened.

Deny. Avoid. Bury it all six feet deep.

At that moment, my father strides over to the table. *Perfect timing.*

We both glance up at him, watching his eyes flick back and forth, likely to figure out where he should sit. He obviously doesn't want to sit next to my mother, or at least he doesn't want her thinking he does. But I'm at the edge of my seat and I'm not moving over.

Sit down next to your ex-wife, Pops. So you both have to look me in the eye for this.

Finally, my mother concedes and scoots over, allowing my father to reluctantly plop down beside her. They share a brief, unenthused look, and my father mumbles, "Elena…"

To which she sighs, "Tom."

I roll my eyes. *Parents are fucking insufferable.*

My dad glances at me from across the table, his face etched in his usual stern, unforgiving lines. Only he looks much more exhausted than usual; beaten down and almost desolate. His facial hair is grown out a bit, his clothes slightly rumpled. *He looks like shit…*

I guess he's been working at some new job I know next to nothing about, so that could be part of the reason why he looks miserable. *Or he's also been dreading this little encounter.*

"Kyran, I'm glad to see that you're alright," he rumbles. "I was worried…"

"Were you?" I huff. "So we've established that you were both worried, but not enough to actually do anything about it."

"Don't be this way." He frowns. "I called you and asked you to come home. Why would you leave school, son? You need your education, no matter what."

"Dad, we both know I'm going to have to choose…" I straighten. "Between football or business school. It's highly unlikely I'll be able to do both…"

He makes a face as if he knows this is true, but he doesn't want to admit it. "Either way, you need to be in school. It's far too important to leave behind so you can go off gallivanting—"

"*Gallivanting?!*" The word comes out with an incredulous scoff. "So you think I left just to run around, fucking off like some irresponsible moron??"

"That's not what I meant," he grumbles, but I don't want to hear it.

Now I'm fucking pissed.

“Okay, let’s just get this out of the way. Because I didn’t ask you both here to talk about football, or business school, or whatever the fuck I decide to do with my future.” I attempt to control my anger, channeling it into finding my words. “We’re here because I’ve been seeing a counselor, talking through my issues, *finally*, after eight years of stuffing this shit down. And I realized that I’ll never be able to move on if I don’t tell you both exactly how I feel.”

My parents share a nervous look, but I don’t give them time to deflect.

I grip the edge of the table and growl, “*You* fucked me. Almost as bad as he did.”

“Kyran—” my dad starts, but I cut him off with a hiss, as quietly as I can manage.

“Both of you! You are *supposed* to love and protect me. You’re supposed to listen to me and support me… You were supposed to stand beside me no matter what, and you should’ve wanted to fucking decapitate that motherfucker for what he did! But *instead*, you acted like it never happened.”

My eyes zero in on my father. “You told me I was *overreacting*. You accused me of making it up. You made me feel like *I* was sick for being raped!”

My mother is shuddering through hushed sobs, and my father’s eyes have never been wider. He looks like he’s going to be physically ill… And it serves him fucking right.

Now you know how I’ve felt every day for eight years, Dad.

“And you.” I glare at my mother. “Your mouth was conveniently shut, any time it wasn’t gulping back Xanax and Pinot. You never said a goddamn *word* to me, never asked me if I was alright, or if I needed to talk to someone.” A furious laugh puffs from my lips. “No, I’m sorry. You said *something*… You said, ‘You have to just move on, Kyran. Dwelling on it will only give it power.’ Great advice for a twelve-year-old who just told you his goddamn priest stuffed a cock down his throat.”

“Kyran!” My father slams his fist down on the table, rattling the plates. “That’s enough! I understand that you want to punish us. I get it… We fucked up.”

“*Fucked up* doesn’t even *begin* to describe—”

“I know!” he roars. “I know, and I’m *sorry*. I’m sorry that I didn’t believe you. I’m sorry that we’re to blame for bringing that piece of

garbage into your life! I can't tell you how sorry I am for what you had to go through, but it's *over*. It happened, and it's done." He pauses while I stare at him, shocked, and so deeply enraged I want to lunge over this table and strangle him to death. "I will have to live with the way I handled that for the rest of my life… But I don't want you to also. I want you to be able to move on, son. Your mother was right… Dwelling on it *does* give it power. Don't give it any more."

Grinding my teeth together, I close my eyes, breathing and focusing on who I am. The *real* Kyran, not the Kyran they think they know.

When I reopen them, I pin my father with a look. "I want you to say it." I witness him gulp, and I lean in. "Say the words, Dad. Out loud."

He shakes his head subtly. "Kyran, I don't—"

"*Say* it," I growl. "This is the reason why I can't move on. *This* is the reason I've been stuck for so long, stuffing the truth down, pretending to be someone else… Because *you* made me feel like the truth made me sick, diseased, or damaged. It *happened*, Dad. It fucking happened, whether or not you wish it didn't, it *did*. You can't pray it away. God doesn't fucking care about your Hail Marys or your penance. Say the fucking words out loud, because they're *true*, or so help me, you'll lose your son. I will walk out of this restaurant, and you'll *never* see me again."

My father rakes his hands through his hair, visibly unsteady as he breathes out slowly. The air around us is thick with heightened tension, silence covering us like a big tarp.

It takes a minute, but finally he looks up, his eyes gripping mine. And he mumbles, "He sexually abused you. Father McAdams… a man we trusted. He did horrendous, disgusting things to you, Kyran. And I did nothing."

The sincerity in his gaze gives me some solace. Hearing the words, *finally*, from his lips takes even more weight off my shoulders. Weight I didn't even know was so heavy until it slips away, and I can finally breathe better. *Much* better.

No more hiding.

"I'm so sorry, Kyran," my mom whispers shakily. "I am so infinitely sorry that it took those other boys coming forward for us to listen. And even then, it wasn't enough."

I nod, my voice creeping out. "No. It wasn't." They both just stare at me. "I didn't want money. I wanted you to give a fuck… I wanted to be

acknowledged, not to feel like I was hiding some illness that needed to be locked away and covered up by this image of the perfect, unsullied son you wish you had."

They both nod, rubbing their faces, appearing generally worn out. And I know I shouldn't delight in their anguish, but I like it. It feels good that they're finally reacting the way they never did back then.

"I just want you to know…" my father croaks, "we never thought you were damaged, Kyran. It just… it hurt to admit that something like this happened when we were supposed to protect you. You didn't deserve it—no one does. But even more, you didn't deserve how we made you feel about it. I'm so sorry that I made you feel unseen…"

Emotion claws up my throat, and instead of swallowing it, I let it out in the form of a gasp, chewing on my lip while we all just stare at each other.

My eyes flick to the waiter, who's hovering a few feet away like he's been itching to come over and see if we need anything, but didn't want to interrupt. I simply wave him off, because not that I have an appetite right now, but even if I did, I don't think I could tolerate an actual meal with these people. Not yet.

We might get there in the future… *Hopefully*, we will. But it's still too fresh.

Taking out my wallet, I remove a twenty and drop it on the table for the waiter and his troubles.

"There's one more thing I need to say," I murmur. "And then I'm gonna go, because it'll probably wrestle up some new bullshit that I really don't feel like dealing with right now. But just know that I do appreciate you both coming here, and listening to me. This was… really helpful."

They blink at me over wide eyes. And I purse my lips, mainly at my father, because I'm sure he's about to flip his lid.

"I'm gay."

Man, that feels fucking great. Wow.

My parents' expressions are frozen solid. It's sort of comical.

My lips quirk, and I huff a small chuckle, shaking my head. "More importantly, I've *always been* gay. I was born this way, and it's just a fact. Also, I'm in love with Avi, and I want to be with him. So… yea. That's that."

Standing up, I cast one last look at their shocked faces, grinning as I pat my father hard on the shoulder. "See ya later, folks."

Striding away from the table, I feel renewed. *Refreshed*.

Yes, it's an ongoing process, but I feel like I took a huge step today, and I'm proud of myself.

I need to go find Avi.

Because fuck all this heavy shit. *I just want to kiss the crap out of him right now.*

Outside on the curb, I pull my phone out of my pocket to order an Uber. I really miss that Mercedes SUV, but as soon as I returned to the city, I had to give it back. It was *not* cheap, and I can't keep burning through my OnlyFans savings. Especially if I still have school to worry about…

I'm entering Frankie's address into the app when a hand grabs my shoulder.

"Kyran…"

It's my father's voice.

I spin to face him, gawking in surprised confusion. But before I can recoil at the idea that he might punch me in the face, he launches himself at me, pulling me into his arms.

Hugging me… My dad is *hugging* me.

I'm stunned into a statue for a solid four seconds, my arms dangling by my sides while my father crushes me to his chest, squeezing me as tightly as he can.

Pressure wells up behind my eyes, and I allow my arms to circle his waist, hugging him back. He's sort of sputtering… He might be *crying*, and I'm freaking the fuck out.

What is happening right now??

"I love you, Kyran," he whispers hoarsely. "I love you so much, and I'm *so* sorry."

Oh damn… This is embarrassing.

Now *I'm* fucking bawling into his chest, and I can't hold it back. Gripping him and shaking while all the walls between us come tumbling down. Brick by brick.

We stand like this for a while, until we finally snap out of it and let each other go, quickly wiping our eyes, trying hard to stifle the visible emotions, because it's in our nature to cover it up. It sucks, but it's the way we were both raised, and it's a hard thing to overcome.

My father blinks at me, and I at him, biting the inside of my cheek because I don't know what to say.

“I’m happy for you,” he says, still sounding like his usual stern self. But the words he’s saying are sincere. *He means it, I know he does.* “For you… and Avi.”

My lips quirk. “I thought you’d be mad… because he’s a guy. And your stepson.”

He chuckles, shaking his head, and I snort a boogery laugh. “I don’t get it. I won’t even try to act like I do… But if this is you, son, then don’t ever change.”

Tears well again, and I stare at the ground while I blink them away.

“You’re strong, Kyran. A hundred times stronger than me, and you always have been,” he says surely. “You’ve grown into an amazing man, and you did that all on your own. *That* is worth being proud over.”

I nod, smiling at him. “Thanks, Dad.”

“And I wouldn’t worry about Avi being my stepson…” His grin slips away. “Because he won’t be for much longer.”

My brow furrows. “What do you mean?”

“Hannah left me,” he sighs. “We’re getting a divorce.”

Um… what?!

“Really??” I gasp, mouth hanging agape in disbelief. “Why?”

“Let’s just say, I’m as bad a husband as I am a father,” he grumbles.

“No… Dad, that’s not—”

“Kyran, it’s true.”

I gulp. “Okay, it is. But still, you can fix it! Go fix things with her like you are with me.”

He smiles sadly. “I think I also have some working on myself to do.” He pats me on the shoulder. “You’ve inspired me, son.”

My heart is literally bursting out of me, I’m so happy. I can’t even believe what I’m hearing, but it feels amazing.

I think I might have a real father… *Only twenty years into my life, but whatever. Better late than never.*

My dad gives me a puzzled look. “So Avi didn’t tell you? About the divorce?”

“I um… haven’t spoken to him in, like, a month.” I rub the back of my neck.

“Why not?” His head tilts.

“I left him… so I could figure this stuff out,” I sigh. “I didn’t want to bring all this emotional baggage into a relationship.”

My father's eyes shine with regret, and I know it's because he's finally recognizing that he's responsible for a lot of my issues. "But if you really… love each other." He chokes on the words a bit and it makes me laugh. "What?? Forgive me, I'm trying."

"I know," I sigh. "You are. It's okay to not get the gay thing right away, Dad. I don't need you to…"

He gives me a stern look, though he's smirking. "All I'm saying is Avi doesn't seem like the kind to turn his back on something good just because it might be difficult."

"You're right," I hum, going back to my phone. "I'm gonna go see him now. It's time."

"You need a ride?" he asks, and I peer at him. *Who is this man??* He just chuckles and nods. "Come on. Let's go."

Alright then.

Following my dad to his car, I hop in with him and he drives us to Brookline. My head is really spinning right now, so many different things bounding around inside me. I'm excited—*ecstatic, really*—with now things are going with my dad. And I'm anxious to see Avi again, for the first time in over a month. So much so that I can't stop moving. My knee is bouncing rapidly, fingers twisting up in my lap as we pull onto Frankie's street.

My dad makes a sound like a small laugh, and I peek at him. "What?"

"You're obviously really excited to see him." He grins. "I've never seen you like this."

Slumping back in my seat, I murmur, "I'm nervous. What if he's mad about me taking off?"

"That doesn't seem like Avi," he replies. And I nod, because he has a point. "I'm sure he'll just be glad that you're doing well."

I point out Frankie's building, and he pulls up along the curb.

"Dad, I really appreciate this," I tell him, unbuckling my seatbelt. "It feels good to be able to talk to you… Like a real father and son."

"I know." He nods. "I just want you to know you'll always have a place in our home… If you wanted to move back. For any reason." He rubs the back of his neck, and I grin. "You could even bring Avi, if you… wanted to…"

I laugh softly. "Yea, I'm sure you'd love that."

"Ky," he mumbles as I open the door. "God loves you, no matter what. Know that. He isn't the God I used to think he was… He's so much *better*.

Caring and sympathetic. Don't let what happened steer you from having real faith. Not the stuff I used to push on you. Faith in *yourself* is faith in Him."

Nodding, I smile at my dad, hopping out of the car and waving him off before I jog up Frankie's stoop. I'm not sure I'll be able to have a relationship with God, after everything… But I also thought that about my dad, and now look at us.

All it takes is finally opening yourself up to it.

Maybe he's right… Maybe faith is just *belief*. Belief in yourself and your own strength; in the complex human life, and your ability to *love* and persevere.

Maybe God is just us, believing.

Outside of Frankie's apartment door, I pause to breathe before knocking. My heart is in my throat, anticipation bubbling in me like a pot boiling over.

I can't wait to see his face… I just want to see *him again.*

But when the door whips open, I'm met with vibrant teal eyes and bright pink hair.

"Oh, hello." Frankie squints up at me, her lips curving into a small smirk. "I knew you'd show up eventually."

"Hi…" I mumble, peering over her head inside the apartment. I immediately spot Bea, Zeb, and Micah. "Is he… here?"

"Don't let him in!" Zeb calls out. "He's the reason my friend is shuffling around like a zombie right now."

I scowl at him, then glance at Frankie. She's just standing there with her arms folded over her chest, hip popped out and everything.

"Frankie, come on. I just need to see him." She says nothing, so I push past her, stalking inside. "Avi??" I'm looking everywhere, frantically stomping around like I expect him to pop out of a closet or something. "Avi?!"

"He's not here," Bea says, brows knitted in concern. Micah elbows her, and she squeaks, "What?? He's obviously upset about them splitting up."

I pause and gawk at them all. "So… he told you that we… broke up?"

"Not in so many words," Frankie croons. "But yea, he told us you ditched him in Cali because you needed some *space*."

My heart…

I'm not sure why I thought Avi might've told them why I left. He'd never betray my trust like that. *So he just told them I dumped him, and now*

they all think I'm the bad guy. Great…

My lips curve, but I smother it. "Where is he? I need to see him…"

"He's preoccupied." Zeb smirks at me.

My heart falls, and I gulp. "Is he… with someone?" My face whips in Frankie's direction. "Is he *dating* someone??"

Frankie pouts, and shakes her head. "You're so sweet. No, pumpkin, he's not dating anyone. He's wallowing… in his new place."

New place?? "Avi got an apartment?"

"He's subletting a place in Brighton with his mom," Micah says.

"I need the address," I demand. They all stare at me, and I roll my eyes. "*Please*."

"It's 501—" Bea starts, but Zeb slaps his hand over her mouth.

My patience is wearing thin. "Okay, listen… You guys don't know the reason why I left, so I understand you're just protecting your friend, because you think I broke his heart. And why wouldn't you?? I've been bullying him and running from him for forever. But the truth is that I'm in love with him. I'm so *crazy* in love with him, and I just want to be with him… To hold his hand, and buy him Twizzlers, and listen to him talk about reptilians. I want to support him like he's supported me, and I want to see his eyes sparkle when he's excited. I'm *in love* with Avi Vega, wholly, truly, un-fucking-deniably." I bend to make eye contact with Zeb. "So I'm gonna need that address… Because I don't *want*, I *need* to kiss him right now. More than I need air in my lungs."

Zeb blinks at me, his forehead lining as his hand slips away from Bea's mouth. "That's the most romantic thing I've ever heard in my life."

"It's like a romance novel!" she squeals.

I peek at Micah, who grins. "It's 501 Chiswick Rd. Apartment 4F."

A giant smile hijacks my lips as I turn to face Frankie. She breathes out slowly, then pinches my chin. "*Not your baby*, my ass," she sneers, and I chuckle. "Go on, *baby*. Go get your boy."

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CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

Slay_is4whors3s: Backwardz_Avi r u Backwardz_Cap??? Where's Not_Your_Baby?!?!
Slickrick762: BC Eagles QB Kyran Harbor just changed his IG to His_Baby… Do you think…????

The picture I've been sketching is *gorgeous*…

And it's pissing me off.

I'm not usually so annoyed while drawing, but right now, I'm frustrated and the songs playing in my ears are all driving me insane.

Love songs… Lyrics about his haze and his reverie…

But *he's* not here. And I'm just… sad. And angry.

Okay, I need to take break… before I snap another charcoal pencil in half.

Ripping the headphones off my head, I toss them down with my pencils, standing up and yanking my hair in my fists. I peer down at the fuzzy blanket on the floor, where Robin is lying, gazing up at me with wide, yellow eyes.

"What are you looking at?" I grumble. She blinks at me. "Mom!" I growl out loud, stalking out of my bedroom.

"Yes, dear?" my mother mumbles from the living room.

I'm in the kitchen in an instant, rifling through the cupboards. "Please tell me we have more Lucky Charms… I'm in need of the kind of comfort only freeze-dried marshmallows can provide."

Mom sighs, a pitying sound, and I shoot a glare in her direction. "Avi, I say this with love…" she starts, standing up from the couch. "You need to smoke some weed. Because you're stressing me out."

My jaw clenches together, in an annoyance that's been surrounding me like an aura for the past five weeks. "You know I quit…"

"Yea, I *know*." She rubs her eyes. "And as your mother, I feel like I need to tell you this… you've been *way* too grouchy the last few weeks. It's making it impossible to even be around you."

She gives me a sympathetic head tilt that forces me to pause my rampant ransacking for junk food.

"Well, I'm *sorry*." I slam the cupboard door. "I *apologize* that my attempt at getting healthy is so inconvenient to everyone."

I know I'm being ridiculous, but I can't help it.

Not only have I not smoked in five weeks, but I also haven't gotten laid in five weeks, and between the two, I've officially become the most insufferable person in the Greater Boston Area.

I'm aware of it. But unfortunately, there's nothing I can do to help it.

I stopped smoking for Kyran. And then he left.

And now I'm just drifting through my days… *driving everyone I know insane with my moodiness, apparently.*

My mother steps over to me, running her hands up my shoulders. "Avi… it's okay to miss him, you know. If you want to talk about him, I'm more than willing to—"

"That's just it," I cut her off. "I *can't* talk about him. Because talking about him makes me miss him even more, and missing him does nothing for me. Because he won't talk to me, I don't know where he is, and I have no idea if he's ever coming back." Stopping to take a breath, I cover my face with my palms. "I don't know what to do with these feelings… I don't know if I'm wasting my time waiting for him. I'm just… lost."

My mom pouts to cover a smile, brushing my hair back with her fingers. "Sweetie, you're not *lost*. You're in love. And I know it hurts sometimes… caring so much for someone and not knowing where they stand."

I blink at her, the weight of my emotions crushing me into the hardwood floor. "So what am I supposed to do, then?"

She stares at me for a moment before murmuring, "Just keep holding on. If it's meant to be, then it'll work out."

She shows me a small grin, and I roll my eyes. "That's really comforting. Thanks, Mom."

Shaking her head, she turns and grabs her coat. "I'm going out for a bit."

“Where??” I grunt.

“Out,” she repeats firmly, heading for the door. “Maybe by the time I get back, you’ll be a little less… severe.”

She leaves while I’m grumbling, “Unlikely.”

Once she’s gone, I sigh, glancing around our new apartment. It’s a sublet, from some nice lady named Jill, who I guess lives down in Florida half the year to escape the cruel New England winters. I know we’ll probably have to find something else in a few months, but for now, it works.

When my mom moved out of Tom’s house in Somerville, it only made sense for us to get a place together again, since I’m no longer in school. I hate to admit it, but I’ve been drifting over the last few weeks, what with Kyran being gone and all. I’d hoped that working on my art would sustain me, but everything I do just ends up reminding me of him.

Living with Frankie was fun while it lasted, but just like my mom is now, she too got sick of my crabbiness. I guess the not smoking and being devastated over the loss of my sweet, sexy control-freak is turning me into the grumpy pessimist Kyran used to be… Before we fell in love.

Ouch. My chest… I miss him so fucking much, goddamnit.

At least my art projects have been distracting me during the day… But at night, I can’t help but feel so monumentally *alone*.

Right now, I’m coasting on the money I had saved up from the OnlyFans, and since I no longer need to worry about paying for school, it works. But I suppose I’ll need to find a job soon… One that doesn’t consist of me fucking my boyfriend on camera.

The *problem* is that my fans are still around, and they’re all just as desperate as I am to get **Not_Your_Baby** back. It’s making me all the more miserable, because truthfully, I would love nothing more than to get the Fans going again. Those few months were the best times of my life… and I have constant DMs from desperate strangers coming in all day every day to solidify the memories.

Abandoning my search for junk food, I tug my phone out of my pocket and scroll through social media. My Instagram is a barrage of comments and messages since I changed my name… People constantly inquiring about my lost partner.

*Where’s **Not_Your_Baby**??*

Will you ever come back to OnlyFans?

*When **Not_Your_Baby** comes back, can we get more sex toy vids?? That was the hottest thing I've ever seen.*

Yea. I know it was…

But I don't just miss the sex with Kyran. Of course, that's just one extremely enticing sugar-dipped part of it. Mostly, I miss *him*. I miss *being* with him…

I miss his smell, his soft skin and his sick body, with all those masculine slopes of perfectly taut muscle… His silky dirty blonde hair, the way his pillowy lips feel kissing me everywhere. I miss his hazel glares and little scowls, but more importantly, his smiles. His laughter, *and* his seriousness.

His hesitance, and his overwhelming past.

I miss *all* of it. I just miss him, and everything we started to be before he took off.

If I could just get him back, I'd spend every single day putting him together, and not caring one bit about it. I would make it my life's mission to fix whatever he thinks is *broken*, if he wanted me to… It would be my *honor* to be his handyman.

No amount of work will ever be *work* with Kyran Harbor.

Because I'm an obvious masochist, I can't help checking his Instagram… just to see if anything new has been posted since I last checked it… two hours ago.

Shortly after he left, Kyran deleted all of his previous posts, which I guess I can understand. None of those pictures captured the real Kyran. It was part of his image, and I guess now he's done pretending.

But this time, when I check his profile, something is different.

His name has been changed… to **His_Baby**.

I blink at the screen, my stomach bunching up tight while my pulse thumps in my throat. His name used to say **QB 9—Kyran Harbor.** But now it says… **His_Baby**.

Chewing on my lower lip, I scroll down to where it used to say *No Posts*, and now there is one. It's a black box of white text that says…

I'm in love with an angel.

Proceeding to read the caption, my chest grows tight as my eyes scan the words…

I'm in love with an angel. And not the kind with wings and a halo.

A human with a heart bigger than a football field.

An angel with talent that knows no bounds, who doesn't conform to societal norms, because those are for suckers.

Who believes in aliens and cryptids… Conspiracy theories? My angel knows them all, and will tell you just how misguided your truths are.

I'm in love with an angel who is gorgeous and sexy, and has a body that'll make you weep… And funnily enough, it's made up almost entirely of sugar.

I'm in love with an angel who uses Twizzlers as straws and gives gummy bears names.

Oh, hello, Bob. Nice to eat you today.

I'm in love with an angel who never stopped believing in me… Even after every bad thing I ever did to him. An angel I used to say hurtful things to, but who still spoke words of encouragement to me when I needed it… Who was there for me when no one else was. An angel who told me it's not over until it's over. Because it's not. I promise, it's not.

My angel was the last person I thought I could love…

But I came back to him, over and over, because my heart wanted him when I didn't understand why. And now I do understand it. It's as clear as the crystalline grayish blue in his eyes.

My angel saved me. He rescued me from hiding. He held me when I needed him, and he loved me when I didn't.

He's selfless, real… just a brilliant, beautiful fucking weirdo.

I'm in love with an angel… And his name is Avi.

My heart is aching, *throbbing* by the time I'm done reading, a tickling pressure in my sinuses making me sniff over and over. I could fall to my knees right now, I'm quaking so deep down to my core.

I can't believe he wrote this… On his real profile. His profile that everyone knows is his. He wrote this for me.

"Where are you, baby?" I whisper to my phone, bottom lip shivering. "Just come *home*."

It feels impossible not to call him right now, but I force myself not to, because I just can't anymore. He hasn't answered a single one of my calls in almost six weeks, and the only time he's said anything to me is that text I received weeks ago, telling me he's okay, and that he's coming back for me. And for that reason alone, I've held out hope.

I need to give him space.

But it hasn’t been fucking easy.

We don’t need to be apart. Because what he doesn’t know is that I didn’t save him… He saved *me*.

I spent most of my life drifting… never really knowing who I was, or what I was meant to be. Until my grouchy stepbrother came along, and showed me.

I’m a *mascot*; someone who supports and rallies for others. I’m an artist and an entertainer. I’m a lover, a friend, but most of all, I’m *in love* with the man who made all of that so painfully apparent to me.

The hot grouchy blonde, with all his internal scars. He took my hand at the edge, and squeezed it. And we fell *together*.

For only the millionth time since he left, I have to force myself to toss my phone away. Rushing into my bedroom, I locate a joint, hidden away in my desk drawer.

I know I quit smoking for Kyran, and I’m proud of myself for holding out as long as I have. But right now, I just need to get high… to numb myself of all these feelings. To forget about how empty I am without him here.

I’m flicking the lighter over and over, grumbling to myself about how it sucks and I need to get a new one, when there’s a knock at the front door.

I freeze with the joint between my lips, standing still for a moment before I pluck it out and toss it back onto my desk. Stowing my frustrations as best I can, I pad my way through the apartment over to the door, more impatient knocking happening as I reach for the handle.

Without a second thought, I whip it open, barking, “Alright, alright… Hold your—”

But all my rumbling annoyance dissolves with my voice when I’m met with hazel eyes, golden hair, and a puffy pink grin.

“Wow…” Kyran sighs, cocking his head. “You look… *distraught*.”

My brow furrows, blinking rapidly as my mouth hangs open. I’m gawking at him for a solid three seconds before I’m finally able to stammer, “N-no, I don’t…”

“You *do*.” His beautiful grin widens, and surely, I’m hallucinating. *He’s not really here… This must be a tulpa I’ve manifested in my state of lonesome misery.* “You look like you’re doing just… *awful* without me.”

I’m shocked. Stunned. *He’s really here…?*

Kyran…

Kyran's here.

And he's *right*. I'm running on fumes, and I know I probably look all disheveled and heartbroken. But there's no way I can *admit* that to him when he just showed up and startled me like this.

So I purse my lips and mutter, "Actually, I'm living the dream. Who even are you?? You're disturbing my lunch of diamond caviar and gold-dipped truffles."

Kyran laughs, and the sound is an awakening. My pulse is racing, chills sheeting my body as he advances toward me, hands coming to rest on my chest as he sort of just pushes his way inside.

And I'm thrown enough to back up, thrilled and nervous and flying high on pure *joy* from *finally* being in his presence again.

The feel of him touching me… The warmth of his hands, the glow of his smile… It's turning me into a bumbling fool. In an instant, I'm shaking.

I just can't stop *staring* at him… and how positively gorgeous he looks, in real life. Not in old pictures I've been staring at, or videos I've watched a million times just to feel close to him. For the first time in over a month, I'm seeing him with my own two wide eyes.

He's real. Real Kyran.

"I hope you don't mind that I just… showed up," he murmurs, backing me up into the nearest wall. "I got your address from your friends."

"I… I don't…" My words won't even come out right. I'm short-circuiting. "I can't…"

"I love making you speechless," he breathes, licking his lips.

"Kyran," I whisper his name, snapping out of it enough to cup his jaw with my hands. "Is it really you?? I need confirmation, because I've had this dream more than a few times…"

He chuckles, leaning in to rest his forehead on mine. "And what happens in these dreams? Are you… happy?"

"Are you *kidding*?" My lips shiver on his. "There is no happiness for me without you."

"God, I fucking missed you…" His fingers slide up my neck, and I have to shake my head.

I can't even believe this is happening. I can't believe he's actually *here*, touching me. Raking his long, perfect fingers through my hair, tucking his face into the crook of my neck and sniffing me the way he used to.

God, I think I'm convulsing.

“Why…” I croak, then clear my throat, as he seals his body to mine, trapping me against the wall. “Why are you here… now?”

“I never *wanted* to be away you from, Avi.” His lips curve into a pout that I can feel while he speaks on my throat. “You have to know that…”

“Tell me *why* then, Kyran,” I whimper, with his hands sliding all over me, like he missed touching me *so bad*. It’s bringing me back to life… I’m resurrected.

“Because, baby…” he hums, regretfully. Hesitantly. That Kyran uncertainty that makes my knees weak. “I couldn’t stand the idea of forcing you to fix me. It wouldn’t be fair.”

“But don’t you know that I don’t care??” I huff, lifting his face so that our eyes meet. “Kyran, I *want* to fix you. Nothing in my life has ever made me happier than to open the door for you every single time you showed up, lost and confused and needing me to show you how good it can feel to let go. I *love* fixing you, baby, and if you need me to, I will. It would be my greatest pleasure.”

“I know that,” he breathes, our gazes sticking like glue. “And I love you for it. But I needed to learn to fix *myself* for us to be together. I want you with the real Kyran, baby. Because the real Kyran fell so hard in love with you, Avi Vega. You got me here. You’re my angel…”

“I just saw your post.” I smirk, and he smiles, teasing my lips with it.

“I want everyone to know whose baby I am,” he whispers.

God, I feel like I’m flying. Falling from up high, but floating in the air.

And yes, it’s still scary. Because I’ve never been in love before, and I’m terrified of losing him again. It’s a staggering notion, putting yourself in someone’s hands like this.

But with his hand in mine, this fall is a great *dive*.

“Please don’t ever leave me again.” I kiss the words onto his sweet, soft mouth that I missed so much I’m about to collapse. “*Please*, Kyran… Anything you’re feeling, we can work it out together. Just don’t… don’t *leave me*.”

I hate how vulnerable I sound, but I can’t help it. Having him back is a shot of dopamine I’ve been seriously lacking since he left.

He hums. “In case you haven’t noticed, I have a bad habit of running from you, baby. But I’m done now… Avi, *you* deserve to be chased.”

My chest is wide open as I cling to him. “It’s not a chase if I’m desperate to let you catch me.”

“Angel Avi…” he purrs and smiles.

No more words. Just lips.

He kisses me first, hard and fast, groaning as he does, like he’s been starved for weeks and he’s finally being nourished again. The reunion of our mouths has my mind going topsy-turvy, heating my blood in an instant. My fingers twitch with need, taking in every surface of him, every curve and dip of hard muscle, every plane of soft skin I can reach. His silky hair and his warmth, and the fact that he’s *smiling* the whole time.

He’s happy, and I’m *soaring*.

“I want to tell you everything…” he whispers hoarsely into my mouth while we pant and suck and lick and bite, grinding together rough to make up for the lost time. “So much good happened while I was gone… even though I hated every second of being away from you.”

“I can’t wait to hear about it, beautiful,” I sigh, replete already just from being with him again. I’m finally settled, and it feels like I’ve just waltzed through the pearly gates of heaven. “I could listen to your voice for hours.”

“You wanna talk now?” He smirks, and I mirror it… two sets of already swollen lips from the force of our ravenous kisses.

“If you’re okay with it…” I bite his bottom lip, and he hums. “I’d rather pick your ass up and fuck you against something first.”

“Always giving me what I need,” he whimpers. “My sweet, strawberry angel.”

Bearing myself against the wall, I grab him by the ass and hoist him up on my body. He gasps and chuckles, wrapping his legs around my waist while I carry him toward my bedroom.

“I love being with someone strong enough to lift me up,” he sighs, fluttering his tongue over my lip, then sinking it into my mouth. My cock throbs against his through our pants.

“You wanna get tossed around a little, sexy thing?” I growl, and he groans, nodding and writhing in my arms.

“I just fucking missed you so bad, baby.” He rips my hair in his fists. “I haven’t come since the last time we were together…”

“Mmm… Not even once?”

He shakes his head.

“Me neither.”

I walk us over to my drawing table and lie him down on it. His legs stay around my waist, clutching me to him while I hold his jaw and kiss him so

furiously it's like I'm punishing his sweet, soft mouth.

"You didn't stroke your big cock while you were missing me?" he whispers.

"Uh-uh." I shake my head. "I couldn't. It only wants you."

"I'm here." He slides his hand between us to rub my shape over my pants. "Let me take care of you."

"Are you talking to me… or my dick?" I grin.

He rumbles a sexy little laugh. "I missed you both equally."

A desperate whimper leaves me as I suck off his mouth just long enough to gaze down at him. I don't think he realizes he's lying on top of a pile of drawings of him… but it's a marvelous sight to behold.

I've been sketching nothing but Kyran for weeks… The only thing my hands seemed to want to do. And now he's here; the real Kyran, *my baby*. Lying on a background of his eyes, and lips and muscled torsos. His beauty captured on paper, which does no justice to the gorgeous being gazing up at me.

Ripping my shirt over my head, I toss it fast, then do the same to his. We're scrambling out of our clothes, fingers chasing, rushing and exploring, fevered breaths echoing around us within the muggy heat of a lust returned home.

"Where's your mom?" he asks as I peel his pants and boxers down his legs, running my hand up the length of his giant, swollen cock.

"She went out to get away from me," I hum, and he laughs. "Apparently, I've been *difficult* to be around these past few weeks."

His lashes flutter as he bites his lip, taming the wild smile that won't leave his mouth. "You mean even Mr. Blasé himself was getting a lil moody?"

"Yea," I growl, shoving my pants and boxers down my thighs. "No weed, no sex, and no Kyran for over a month turned up the grump-o-meter."

His eyes sparkle up at me. "You haven't been smoking…?"

My chin dips as I trace his abs with my fingertips. "I quit before the Rose Bowl." He blinks at me, and I clear my throat. "I… I didn't want to be foggy with you, baby. Plus, you're a better high than any drug could ever give."

He looks like he's stunned and elated by what I'm saying, his wide chest moving up and down with panting breaths.

“Angel…” He sighs, using his feet to push my pants down lower. “Get all the way naked for me. Get naked and fuck me the way I need you to…”

Of course I do, giving him exactly what he wants, because *nothing* makes me happier than pleasing him. Giving him what he *needs*.

Peering over my shoulder at the bedroom door, which isn’t closed anywhere near enough, I mumble, “If my mom comes home early, she’ll be scarred for life.”

We both chuckle, kissing and melding our heated flesh together.

“Well… remember Christmas?” he rumbles, and I nod. “The potential of getting caught is a kink I love exploring with you… *bro*.”

I laugh into his mouth, grinding my cock on his, tips all sticky, balls brushing in slow strokes. He touches my chest, gripping my pecs and teasing my nipples. It feels so sensual, erotic, the way we’re coming together with nothing in the way.

It’s Kyran and Avi uncensored. *Real sex, real love.*

“If the fans could see us now,” I mumble on his mouth, reaching around for some lube I know is in one of these drawers.

Kyran stops our kisses, and I blink down at him to find him flushing up at me, lust-drunk and so goddamn beautiful. “We should record it. For old time’s sake.” I cock a brow at him while he bites his lip. “Show them that we’re back together. We owe it to them, after all… *Us*.”

My stomach flutters at what he’s suggesting. All this time, I thought Kyran regretted the OnlyFans. I thought he saw it as something that could harm his reputation, and I blamed myself for getting him mixed up in it.

But as it turns out, we *were* doing this for the fans… Because we turned out to be fans, too.

“What about… the NFL?” I ask, and he shrugs.

“If they really want me, they’ll get over it.” He traces my bottom lip with his finger. “Just one last hoorah… What do you think, my Backwardz Angel?”

I grin and bite it. “I think it’s about to be *real* obvious whose baby you are, superstar.”

He makes a hungry sound while I reach down for his pants, pulling out his phone. He unlocks it for me, my lips dancing on his. “For the fans?”

He grins, kissing me softly. “For the fans.”

Kyran holds the phone while I pour lube all over my fingers, stroking it onto my dick, then swiping some between his cheeks. He gasps as I

massage the lube on his rim, slipping a finger inside him.

“For us…” I kiss his neck, fingering his hole nice and slow.

“Always for us,” he purrs.

“Action,” I hum, and his laugh turns to a groan when I slide in a second finger.

Kyran holds up the camera, recording me while I kiss all over his chest, fluttering his nipples with my tongue, my fingers pumping in and out of him, drawing out frantic breaths.

“My baby’s back.” I suck and bite the words onto his chest, making hickeys on his flesh that cause him to grumble.

“You’re not wearing the hat,” he snickers breathlessly. “They might not recognize you.”

Peeking up at the camera, I smirk. “This is **Backwardz_Cap**, reporting live from in between **Not_Your_Baby**’s legs.” He chuckles, then whines when I touch his prostate. “Mmm… capture that, babe. Look at how wet your dick gets feeling me inside…”

He aims the camera at his cock, resting on his abs beneath mine, all engorged and pulsing out pearls of precum. I have to take a second to play with it, slipping my thumb into the skin and swirling it around his head with all the slickness.

“Please hold,” I grunt, crouching and draping his knees over my shoulders. “This needs to be licked.”

Using my tongue on his dick, I slip it inside the skin, sucking and sucking his head out like one of those push-pops.

“Ohh… *Avi*,” his words flutter. “I missed your tongue teasing me like that…”

“I missed sucking on this pretty pink head,” I growl, and he whines, fingers twisting in my hair while he records me loving up on his delicious cock.

My fingers continue to stroke in his ass, a third being added to the mix that clenches his abs.

“You wanna get fucked, superstar?” I tug at his nuts until he’s shivering.

“Yea… yes, *please*,” he whimpers, spreading his legs wider, arching his back like he’s offering his hole up to me. “Fuck my ass, baby. Fuck it like you missed it.”

“*God*, I fucking missed it…”

Pulling my fingers out slowly, I stand back up, wedging myself between his legs and wasting no time sinking my cock between his cheeks. Kyran is holding the camera, but I'm not even paying attention to it. As usual.

My eyes are on him, on his eyes wanting to droop shut when my crown slips in, his parted plush lips quivering. His Adam's apple that I just *love* biting and sucking, dips in his throat as I feed my dick into his greedy hole. And he swallows me up… Every. Aching. Inch.

Snatching the camera away from him, I capture the visual of me barreling in all the way, holding his balls and moving them to get the perfect view.

"Fffuuuck, Avi…" He reaches for my waist while I pull back and push in, the sensation of being inside him again sheeting my body with manic shivers. "I love you… I *love*… your big… thick cock."

"You missed this dick, baby?" I groan, and he nods fast, his ass gripping me while I slide, working up a rhythm in his hot, quivering body.

"I missed this dick…" His fingers dig into my sides. I pump harder, jostling him up and down on the table with my increasingly sturdy thrusts. "I missed this perfect dick fucking me so good."

"This dick was made to fuck you, beautiful." My head is spinning as I melt over him, kissing his lips and recording myself doing it. "We fit together so well."

"You make me whole," he whispers into my mouth.

"I love you," I croak, driving into him harder and harder, grabbing a handful of his ass and holding him to me. "Stay with me forever, baby…"

"I'm yours, Aviel," he sighs, and my heart is breaking through my chest. "Just yours. Always."

Setting the phone down for a moment, I pick him up and flip us around, so that my back is on the table, and I'm holding him up on my waist. His eyes widen at the sudden position change, and I'm obsessed with the look. Kyran sitting astride my lap, his knees braced on the table, sweat-slicked skin flushed and glistening, golden hair all tousled and hanging in his face.

"Ride me, gorgeous," I plead up to him. "Show me how much you missed fucking my cock."

His head drops back, and he groans, pawing at my chest while his hips move, working his hot, tight hole up and down my shaft. He's a *revelation*, this man. I could get off just watching him.

I get it, fans. I totally see it.

“Uhh… Avi,” he cries softly, his dick bobbing while he chases the high, swiveling and rocking on me. The table is creaking beneath our weight, banging against the wall. “Fffuck, it feels amazing. I’m gonna come so soon…”

“Make yourself come on me, baby.” I grip his hips, helping him ride. “Fuck that sweet spot with my dick.”

“*Mmmfff*… you’re like… all over it.” He clenches on me, muscles tightening visibly as he climbs and climbs.

“You want me to come on it?” I grab the phone to capture just a bit of this because it looks so damn crazy fucking good.

“Yea, baby. *Ohh*, angel… come inside me.” He bounces harder, lost to the sensation. “Soak my prostate with your hot cum…”

“Jesus, your mouth is fucking filthy,” I roar, pushing my hips upward to meet his thrusts, our bodies jamming together rougher and faster. “Give me all your dirty words… Tell me how you wanna come, my beautiful, big-dicked slut.”

“Ohhfuck… oh fuck oh fuck… *Avi*, I’m a slut for your cock.”

“Yea, you are, baby.”

Tense, sweating, squirming, and losing my fucking mind, my back has papers stuck to it, sliding up and down on the table while he rocks my fucking world.

“Fuck the cum out of me, Daddy,” he chokes, and I rasp a breathless chuckle, watching his eyes roll back in his head. “*Fuuuck*… fuck my ass. Fuck… my… tight… Oh God, I’m coming!”

I can barely even hold the phone, but I make sure to capture him coming because it’s the sexiest thing I’ve ever seen in my life. His huge, rock-hard cock pulsing out streams all over me while he humps my fucking brains out. He’s fucking himself on me so hard, the cum is just spraying all over the place, his wet cock slapping on my abs while he sobs and mewls and pinches my nipples until I just can’t take it anymore.

Dropping the phone onto the floor, I grip his back, holding him to me as trembles rack my loins and I explode into a meteor shower of an orgasm.

“Baby… I’m coming in you,” I whimper, pulling him down to me. “K-kiss me. Kiss me, Kyran, oh my *God*, I love you.”

He collapses onto me, our teeth clashing while we suck and lick and bite each other, groaning and grunting into each other’s mouths.

“Avi… Ahhh-veee, angel, I feel you coming in my ass… *Fuck*, it feels so good.”

“Y-yea? You feel me spilling in you, love?”

“Your cum feels so good in me. I *love you*, baby. I love how you fuck…”

Holding his jaw, our bodies grind together in a big sweaty cum-drenched pile of muscles. I lick his bottom lip, sucking it hard, devouring the dirty words as they pour from his luscious mouth.

“I fucking missed you.” I shudder as we finally stop moving, limbs shaking, hearts leaping into one another.

“I missed you like crazy.” He lifts his face enough for us to lock eyes.

The love flowing between us is palpable, like an explosion of chemistry; a force that will never die down. It’s always been this way with us… An unexplainable draw that pulls us together.

We spend a few heavy seconds petting each other, my fingers in his hair and his trailing from my jaw down my throat. And we’re just staring, *feeling* it.

We’re finally here. Snapped into place. *Whole*.

Kyran kisses my bottom lip a few times while I just lie here breathing, fuzzy and warm all over. *Happy*, for the first time in weeks. Because my man is back, and he feels good. We made it. *We won the game.*

He moves back, and I hold his hands, pulling out and helping him stand up. He bites his lip, pressing his legs together, and it’s somehow the hottest and most adorable thing I’ve ever seen, watching him squirm at the feel of my cum gushing out of him. Standing up slowly, I take his hand and kiss his palm.

He grins, eyes shifting to something behind me. His brows furrow, and I realize that he’s noticing all my drawings.

“Oh… yea,” I mumble sheepishly as he reaches for the pictures. “I did those… I mean, I was just missing you, so I…” My voice trails off, and I gulp.

“Avi…” he breathes, sifting through papers that are now all rumpled, covered in our sweat. “These are *incredible*.”

I scoff, shaking my head. “They’re just sketches.”

“*These* are just *sketches*??” He gapes at me. “Look at the lines… Wow.” He keeps flipping through all the drawings I did of him while he was gone.

And some I did before… back in the dorm, when we were still theoretically *fucking for the fans*.

Some are just his eyes, or his mouth. Some are his full face, some just his body. I have ones of him sleeping and ones of him smiling, scowling, fucking, and coming. There are probably close to fifty sketches of Kyran Harbor, proving once more that I've been obsessively into him for so much longer than I cared to admit.

"You've been drawing me the whole time… haven't you?" he whispers, blinking shimmery eyes at me.

"Kind of…" I murmur, and he grins. I love seeing it so much that I sigh, "*Okay*, yes. I've been in love with you for a while… clearly."

Kyran pouts and throws his arms around my shoulders, draping himself on me. And like the only real instinct I've ever had, my arms circle his waist, and I hold him.

"I'm sorry for all the time I wasted being scared," he whispers.

I shake my head. "Don't ever apologize for that. You're worth all the time in the world, baby. I would've waited years for you."

He kisses my cheek, then my neck, breathing softly as he asks, "Can I keep the pictures?"

I chuckle. "I can do better ones for you…"

"I like those."

And his words give me an idea.

Pulling back, I cup his jaw in my hand. "Let's go get cleaned up, baby. I have something to show you."

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CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

Kyran Harbor is “in a relationship” with Avi Vega
Avi Vega is “in a relationship” with Twizzlers

His_Baby: What a fool…
Backwardz_Avi: My alien came back to Earth! 👽

Color me bat-shit crazy. Because I’m mad, bonkers, foolishly in love right now.

My man is *back*, and I’m bouncing in excitement to show him what I’ve been working on while he was gone. *I mean, other than the obsessive sketches.*

Honestly, I’m kind of surprised that he loves to sketches as much as he apparently does. If you hung them all up on one wall, it would look like the kind of psycho-stalker shrine lunatics make for celebrities whose bushes they jerk off in.

Who knows, maybe I *am* that level of obsessed with Kyran. But he seems to think it’s endearing, so we’ll just go with that.

After we showered, which took much longer than it should have because we couldn’t seem to keep our mouths away from each other’s dicks, I packed my stepbrother boyfriend into an Uber and brought him to Davis Square in Somerville. We held hands the entire ride, making heart eyes at each other… It was sickeningly sweet, and I’m living for it.

I know things with Kyran won’t always be as perfect as they are right now. We still haven’t really talked about the issues that made him leave in the first place. But I can’t deny the fact that he seems happier than I’ve ever

seen him before. I recognize the Kyran I'm with right now… From the little glimpses I would get when we were alone together, like at the drive-in or the Rose Bowl after-party, when he kissed me in front of everyone.

And I know now that *this* is the real Kyran. Smiling and laughing, not lashing out at me because of his own insecurities, or forcing himself to deny what makes him happy.

The real Kyran seems infinitely more centered, peaceful, and joyous. I'm not so naïve as to think he'll always be like this. After all, he suffered something so traumatic, it makes all the sense in the world that he'd have a second personality. Like a shield up to protect him from ever having to relive his pain.

But honestly, I fell in love with all the versions of him. I just want every shade of Kyran Harbor, every day, in whatever way he happens to be feeling.

Walking around the corner, our fingers still entwined, I murmur, "Alright… Close your eyes."

"Oh, so it's one of *those* surprises?" He smirks at me.

"Yes, dear," I hum, and he chuckles. "Close your damn eyes or I'll be forced to cover them."

He squints at me. "You're being pretty bossy right now. I'd like a refund."

"And you've got jokes all of a sudden," I tease, and he laughs some more. "It almost seems like we body-swapped while you were away."

"Mmm… I wanna be in your body," he rumbles, yanking me to him by one of my belt loops.

"You're being entirely too fresh right now." My lashes flutter at the feel of his lips on my neck. "I'm trying to show you something important."

He whines with his hands all over me. "I'm sorry… I just missed you so much. I didn't touch you for weeks when all I wanted in the world was to do it. I have to make up for lost time."

"Trust me, I know the feeling, superstar," I breathe, feeling him smile on my ear.

"I love that you still call me that," he murmurs, and I chuckle. "It reminds me of you driving me crazy using all my shampoo when we shared a bathroom."

"Okay, first of all, that was *my* shampoo…"

He gasps. "You're fucking nuts!"

“Am not! I bought it for myself!”

“Avi, no offense, but you were baked more often than not. I’ve never known you to buy your own shampoo. You just steal it from everyone else.” He stares at me pointedly.

My gaze narrows while I try to think back on *any* instance when I went into a store and purchased shampoo. But I’m coming up blank.

“*Fine*… You might be right,” I grumble, and his lips curl. “But this is all irrelevant. I’m gonna be stealing your shampoo for the foreseeable future, so you better get used to it.”

He blinks at me, biting his lip to contain an obvious grin. “Is that your way of saying you want to live with me again?”

My heart jumps against my ribs. *No shit*, I want to live with him. Being with him every day sounds like a sex-dream come true. But I wasn’t sure it was something he wanted yet…

“Do you… want us to live together?” My fingertip draws a figure-eight over his heart.

Kyran’s lips slope into a smile that compliments the fuck out of the shimmering excitement in his eyes. “I think living with you would be the most fun thing ever. We could wake up in bed together, do a little of the old in-and-out…” I cackle, and he beams. “Cook pancakes in our underwear, cuddle on the couch and watch movies… Argue about what takeout to order.”

I laugh again, shaking my head at his insufferable cuteness. “You mean like we were just on the cusp of being able to do in 446 before Ash Holloway showed up and ruined it?”

He chuckles. “Yea. Exactly.”

“Okay, then.” I pinch his chin between my fingers. “It’s settled. We’ll move in together. In our own place.”

Kyran is practically skipping in place, hugging me and kissing my face. Seriously, if this is what it’s like to make him happy, I think I might need to make a career out of spoiling the shit out of him.

And best of all, people are walking by us on the street while he’s showering me with affection, and he clearly doesn’t mind at all. At last, we’re in a *real* relationship, out in the open. *I have a boyfriend!*

I might have slipped through a portal into another dimension. But whatever. I’m staying.

“Kyran, seriously,” I whine, peeling him off of me. “You’re derailing my surprise…”

“Sorry,” he chirps, backing up and covering his eyes with his hands. “So sorry, angel. Lead the way.”

My grin is like a neon sign flashing *love virgin* as I take him by the arm, walking him a few steps and around the other corner to the side of the restaurant.

I gaze up at it for a moment, beaming with pride whilst fidgeting with nerves as I breathe, “Okay… You can look.”

Kyran’s hands slide away from his eyes. I watch him closely while his eyes widen and his jaw drops, observing the giant spray-painted mural.

“Avi… Oh my God…” His tone drips with awe. “You did this??”

“Mhm.” I chew on the inside of my cheek, hoping like hell that he likes it.

He likes it, right?? I mean, I know it’s not the best thing ever, but… he probably likes it…

“This is the most amazing thing I’ve ever seen!” he gasps, turning to face me.

My stomach flips, and I let a timid smile out. “You really like it?”

“*Like* it?? It’s fucking amazing!” He chuckles in disbelief, wandering closer to the wall. “Look, there’s me!”

I rumble a laugh. “Yea, that’s you, superstar.”

He peeks at me, beaming before returning to inspecting the mural. And all the little subtleties I put into it to make it *ours*.

The owners of Chow Down, this awesome Asian fusion place here in Davis Square, were looking for a local artist to do a mural on their wall. Frankie heard about it and gave them my number, and of course I was thrilled to do it. I haven’t done any street art or graffiti since I left New York, but it’s always been a dream of mine to do a big mural in a place where tons of people would see it every day.

And that’s exactly what I did.

The cherry on the sundae is that Bette and Tony Chow, the owners, are huge college football fans. So when I told them I wanted to do something special for Kyran, they were obsessed with the idea of incorporating the Eagles and our win into the portrait.

“And there’s you, right?” Kyran points to the eagle with hearts around his head soaring on a rainbow. “The gay eagle?”

I laugh and nod. “Excuse me. I’m bi, remember?”

“Oh, is that why you did this magenta, purple, and blue here?” He smirks, and I nod. “Aww, there’s Robin,” he croons. “She’s wearing a mask and a cape like actual Robin!” I nod along. “And there’s a bat signal, and Mr. Freeze… Ooh, Vincent Vega doing the twist on a stage made of Twizzlers!”

I’m cackling. *Seriously, I might be crying a little too.*

“Avi, this is so fucking sick! There’s so much detail… I feel like I’d need to look at it for hours to find everything. Like a *Where’s Waldo*.”

“Well… we’ll have to come back.” I wrap my arms around his waist from behind, kissing the nape of his neck. “Maybe we could even get a place around here… So we could see it all the time.”

He peeks at me over his shoulder. “I’m like… stupidly in love with you.”

“Baby… I’m fucking *moronically* in love with you.” I kiss his lips while he chuckles. “Are you hungry?” He nods, rubbing his ass on my crotch. “For *food*, Kyran.”

“Oh, yea. I’m starving,” he snickers.

“Okay… How about I take you on a date?”

He spins in my arms. “Our first official date?!”

“Fuck yea.”

He tugs on the brim of my backwards cap. “Well alright, then. *Spoil* me, Backwardz Avi.”

Cupping his jaw, I kiss his lips softly. “Anything for you, Only My Baby.”

Hours later, we return to Brighton from the best first date ever, hands still clasped, stomachs as full as our hearts.

We had dinner at Chow Down, and damn near closed the place we were in there for so long, talking about everything under the sun, catching each other up on all that happened while we were apart.

I can even voice how proud I am of Kyran for starting counseling and confronting his parents. And the shock of how things turned out with Tom

was definitely the biggest surprise of the evening.

I love a good redemption story, and it seems like Tom is on his way to one, which makes me really happy. I'm sure there was more to the deterioration of his relationship with my mother, so it's not like I want them to try to work it out or anything. From what Kyran was telling me, his dad has his own soul-searching to do, and I think my mother will eventually find someone more like my dad to make her happy.

I know divorce sucks, especially after only a few years. But the marriage wasn't a waste of time, not by a long-shot. Because if they'd never gotten together, I never would've met Kyran…

A perfect roll in this cosmic game we call life.

"I still can't believe you haven't smoked at all since before the Rose Bowl," Kyran says while we're lying in my bed, his head resting over my heart and my fingers in his hair. "You know I never actually hated your smoking, right?"

"No, I know," I tell him while he plays with my hand, tracing lines on my palm. "I just think I was relying too heavily on it. It's never good to lean on substances for anything."

"That's very wise, angel," he says, focusing on one line in particular.

"Which street is that?" I ask him softly.

He peeks up at me. "It's our street. Summer Street." He runs his fingertip over it. "This is where I met you for the first time… Where I thought I hated you, when really, I… secretly liked you." I grin, and he bites his lip. "This is where you found me on Christmas Eve… When you brought me my coat and held me close to you." His eyes hold mine, and I can feel everything he's confessing through those orbs of gold and green. "That was where I realized that I was falling for you… I wouldn't have admitted it at the time. But that night, I knew something had shifted. We weren't doing it for the fans anymore… if we ever even were to begin with. That night, it felt like a switch flipped in me, and I wasn't terrified of my feelings for you anymore."

I blink at him, breathing in these words he's speaking.

"I was still scared of my past, yes. I was scared of what I thought it might mean, me falling in love with a guy. Because of everything…" His voice trails, and I nod, stroking his hair in calming brushes. "But I wasn't afraid of how good you made me feel anymore. I wanted so much *more* of it. And it reminded me of when I was a kid…"

Kyran presses a kiss on my palm. “I wanna share some things with you, Avi… Because I know you won’t be afraid of it, and it won’t make you love me any less. I *know* that now.”

“Nothing about you or what you’ve been through would ever make me love you any less, baby,” I whisper, and he nods.

“But when I tell you, I want you to be *Avi* about it,” he murmurs, and my brow furrows.

“What does that mean?”

He chuckles. “I just mean… don’t treat me any differently. Don’t ever tiptoe around me, or coddle me with words. You’re not a counselor, you’re my boyfriend, and I love you for the way you are. So when I tell you stuff, I want you to just be *you*. Make jokes, be sarcastic and goofy. *Please*… just don’t pity me.”

It hurts my heart that he even needs to say this to me, but I understand where he’s coming from. Pushing his sandy hair from where it’s flopping over his forehead, I nod in agreement.

“I promise, I would never pity you, baby. I mean, I’m not sure how much I’ll want to be joking about what you’re going to tell me, but I would never treat you any differently. You’re *Kyran*, my first love. The only person who’s ever been to my abandoned amusement park.”

He laughs, his body shaking on top of mine and wiggling my toes with delight.

“This amusement park doesn’t seem so creepy and run-down, by the way,” he teases. “You made it seem like it would be much scarier than it is.”

“Yea, well… this coming from the guy who watches *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* as a comfort movie.”

“It soothes me,” he sighs, and I chuckle. He’s quiet for a moment before he asks, “How old were you when you first realized you might be bi?”

I chew on my lower lip, remaining silent for long enough that he peeks up at me. “You’re totally gonna think I’m lying about this, but I swear to God, it’s the truth…” His eyebrow arches. “Four years ago. It was… the first time I saw you.”

He lets out a cackling laugh, shaking his head. “There’s no way that’s true!”

“I swear it is! I never looked at anyone before the way I looked at you. I didn’t want to admit it, because you were so mean and you hated me so

much.” He pouts, and I brush my thumb over his lips. “But it’s true. I actually thought maybe I was gay at first.”

“But you’re still sticking to the fact that you’re bi?” He smirks.

“I liked hooking up with the girls I hooked up with.” I shrug. “But honestly, I don’t even know if I would say *bi*… I could be pan, or omni. I don’t want the label. I’ll just call myself queer because I don’t think gender plays a role for me when it comes to being attracted to someone. To quote the majestic David Rose, I like the wine, not the label.”

Kyran purses his lips over a loving smile, nestling up on top of me. “I love that for you, angel.”

“How about you?” I stroke his hair some more. “You’ve hooked up with your fair share of girls… Tell me about how you feel.”

He sighs. “I figured out that I was gay right before I turned twelve.”

My heart thuds in my chest at this revelation. This is something I never knew about Kyran… I always assumed he was bisexual because of all the girls he’s been with. But now he’s saying he’s fully gay, and he’s known since he was a kid.

“And to be clear… I’ve only slept with two girls.” He gives me a pointed look.

My lashes flutter. “Really??” He nods. “But you always had different girls hanging on you at parties, and on your Instagram.”

He pretends to cough to cover up the words, “Insta-stalker.” I glare at him, and he laughs. “I’ve hooked up with a few others, but no more than, like… five altogether. I think that’s why I gravitated toward clingy girls who wanted relationships, like Becca and Lexi. Because if they locked me down, I didn’t have to worry about acting as much.”

“Baby,” I breathe, caressing his jaw. “I had no idea. So clearly you are, like… very talented.” He chuckles, biting his lip. “You’re Leo in *Django* level!”

His face lights up. “Wow! Thank you,” he chirps while I snort.

God, I love learning about him. I don’t think I’ll ever get sick of listening to him share these intimate details of his life… Even when they’re ultimately tragic. I just feel so goddamn special that he’s confiding in me.

“I noticed that I liked looking at boys, my friends, more than I liked looking at the girls. It wasn’t sexual, but I just had this feeling in my stomach that someday I wanted to date a boy. But then, after what happened… I stuffed it all down and pretended it wasn’t true. I buried it so

deep that after a while, I convinced *myself* I liked girls. The denial was thick, and it was because of something he used to say to me. Something he said when he was… abusing me."

The way he gulps over the words breaks my heart in two. But I won't let it affect the way I am with him, because I know he doesn't want that.

He's still my Kyran, no matter what.

"He brought it up… how he saw me looking at boys," he goes on. "Like he knew some secret about me, and that was why he was doing it. He said that because I was gay, I needed to let him… do those things to me. Like it was a penance or something."

Kyran goes quiet for a moment, and I rumble, "Baby…"

He looks up at me with vulnerability in his eyes.

"I've been building this… car. It's like a time-traveling Delorean, if you will. And I could totally go back in time and kick this dude in the nuts for you."

A giant smile sweeps over his lips, and he chuckles, shaking his head. But I can see the appreciation in his eyes, for me joking with him. It's what he wants… And I can't say that I know how any of this feels, but I can understand him wanting me to make light of the heavy stuff. After all, it's what I do.

I'm the one who shuffles and fist pumps on the sidelines when he's freaking out… I'm the one who jokes and teases him when he's getting all up in his head.

I'm happy to be his mascot all the time, whenever he needs me.

Avi the Angel takes care of his baby.

"Babe…" he murmurs, gazing up at me. "I want you to know that he never actually… I mean, he did things to me, but he didn't…"

"My love," I whisper, holding his face. "It doesn't matter."

"No, I know. But I want you to know," he sighs, tiredly, like even talking about this stuff for a few minutes takes the wind out of his sails. "You were my first, Aviel. I promise."

"I *know* that," I tell him with absolute certainty. "You giving me your virginity was the best night of my life."

He grins, puffing out a small laugh. "I just remember your face when Bridget said what she said in the restaurant… I didn't want you to think I was lying to you, or hiding something."

"I didn't think that, gorgeous."

He nods, chewing on his lip. “Bridget knew that I liked boys. I mean, I never actually told her outright, but she picked up on it. That was another reason she was so pissed off with our parents after everything. Because my dad made a few comments I wasn’t supposed to hear when they were fighting, about the abuse turning me gay…”

I roll my eyes. “Dumb bullshit.”

“I know, right?” he scoffs. But then his eyes soften. “He’s trying now, though. I’m proud of him. To be honest, I think part of the reason why he flipped his switch is because of you.”

“Me?”

“Yea. I told my parents that I’m in love with you, and I think maybe that got my dad. He likes you a lot, Avi. It’s clear, he’s always liked you. It was part of the reason I was so frustrated by you when they got married… Because you were this carefree art nerd, total opposite of the son he wanted *me* to be, but he still liked you.”

“Your dad isn’t a bad person,” I rumble. “He’s flawed just like everyone, and he’s made some terrible mistakes. But he doesn’t deserve to burn for them.”

Kyran goes quiet for a moment, like he’s deep in thought, before he says, “I just wish I hadn’t wasted so much time swallowing my truth.” He shakes his head. “I think back on the girls I dated, even flirted with… it turned into like this choreographed performance. And the pussy eating…”

He blinks hard and shakes his head.

I can’t even help myself. My head tips back in a laugh that has him grinning up at me. “You ate a lot of pussy??”

“Not a *lot*…” He smirks. “But I definitely did it.”

“And?”

“Not for me,” he sighs.

This is blowing my mind right now.

“Oh my God, that’s why you seemed so hesitant with Frankie!” I gape at him, and he chuckles.

“I was so hard thinking about you,” he whispers, squirming on top of me. “I kept thinking about your hand inside your pants, secretly wishing you’d pull your cock out and maybe, like… touch me with it.”

A hum rumbles in my chest while I gaze down at him, lust and love and pure astonishment in my eyes. “Come here, please…”

He scoots up on me, allowing me to hold his jaw and pull his sweet, honest mouth to mine. “What else did you think about during our stupid threesome with my best friend?”

He laughs on my lips. “Your hand touching mine… While we both fingered her. I imagined what it would be like if you took your fingers out and let me suck on them.”

“Mmm… really?”

He nods. “Yea. But not to taste her vagina, obviously. I just really wanted to suck on something of yours.”

A whine leaves my lips, and he laughs at it. “You’re killing me right now. God, baby, I would’ve done *everything* to you… I wanted it so bad at that point.”

“Yea?” He kisses along my jaw, sucking my earlobe between his lips.

“Yea… As soon as you gave me the green light, I was fucking salivating for it.”

He chuckles while my hands sink down to hold his ass, his lips and tongue toying with my ear. “I guess it’s a very fucking good thing that my dad’s business went under, huh?”

“Oh yea. If it wasn’t for the fans, we might never have hooked up. Or fallen in love…”

“Are you saying that everything we’re doing is still… for the fans?” he whispers in my ear, and I grin.

“It’s for us,” I tell him, my heart so full of wild, cheering love for this man… “But they got us here.”

He sighs. “Out of Friend Land…”

“And into Boyfriend Park.”

He laughs, and I kiss it while it’s happening.

Kyran and Avi, falling in love… for the fans.

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KYRAN'S EPILOGUE

Nickystix66: Backwardz you're the luckiest dude ever
Am_luv13: His_Baby you're an inspiration!
A_side_of_steve: Backwardz_Avi & His_Baby return! Coming out & revealing your relationship… You've made my life!

3 Months Later…

"Ooh, yea, baby. Shake that ass."

Stuffing my face deeper into the comforter, I wiggle my hips, using leverage on my knees to sort of twerk backward, up into the air.

"Okay… Hold on. I need to adjust my boner," Avi rumbles, and I laugh.

"Just record the damn video!" I shout at him through my chuckles.

"I got it," he sighs, and I flip over, aiming a glare at him that no one's buying. It's too full of love. He tosses his phone onto the bed, then crawls over me, grasping my wrists and pinning them above my head as he straddles me. "I think this would get us even more likes…"

He rubs his dick on mine, and I'm shivering.

"Don't be naughty." I grin up at him. He pouts. "I think we gave the Fans a proper send-off. They'll have to settle for the PG-13 content from now on."

"I know, I'm just visualizing all that glorious money floating away in the breeze," he hums.

He leans over me, and I kiss each stone of his abs, considering his words.

Three months ago, Avi and I caved and started making content for the OnlyFans again. As it turns out, he was able to reinstate his account since I guess he'd only temporarily deactivated it. There was a penalty fee, but it was chump change compared to what we went back to earning the second it was on.

Of course, it was a little obvious that it was me in the videos, but with my face blurred, there was still no way to prove it. We figured we could keep it up long enough to save some more money, and then delete all the videos of the two of us, and he could keep it as a solo account.

And so that's what we did. Two weeks ago, we let everyone know it was going back to a solo account for Avi, and that the mysterious **Not_Your_Baby** wouldn't be featured in videos anymore.

But here's the kicker. Since the first time we disabled the account, people have been clamoring for us. And not just for the sexy times… They've wanted to see us together as a *couple*. So we started making content on Instagram, reels and stuff like that, just of us goofing around, being silly and stupid and in love. And we've been getting paid for it.

Kyran and Avi, the social media couple, break millions of views on damn near every video. It allows Avi to focus on his art, which is now his full-time job, and me to focus on the huge, life-changing event I'm about to start this summer…

The NFL.

That's right… Your boy was drafted last week. Two months from now, I'll be in training camp as a second-string quarterback for the Philadelphia Eagles.

From one Eagles to the next… *Is that the coincidence of a lifetime or what??*

The whole thing still feels like a dream. I remember getting the call, and feeling like I was going to collapse. Third-round draft pick. I was prepared to go anywhere that would have me, but the word was it would come down to either Philly or New York.

Philly won.

Avi is freaking thrilled, despite the fact that I'm not going to New York. He would've loved to move back to New York, but then Philly will be just as cool. It's like a New York-y Boston anyway, so we're really excited about it.

We'll be traveling a ton, but he doesn't mind that either. And I'm just excited to have him coming along on this journey with me, cheering me on and supporting me as he does. Because he's my sidekick, my partner, *my* mascot… *My sweet, strawberry-flavored angel.*

We're finalizing paperwork on a townhouse on Federal Hill next week, and Avi already has a whole list of things planned for us to do when we get

to Philly.

It'll be tough for him to leave Hannah. We even offered to bring her with us, but she likes her job in Boston, and already found herself a nice place in Cambridge, so she's happy to stay. As much as I know Avi's going to miss her, he insists that it's time for him to spread his *eagle wings* a little. *So damn cute.*

They'll always be best friends, but we're going on this adventure together. Just the two of us. Well, us… and the fans.

"Don't worry, angel," I hum, licking up his chest while he shivers. "Your NFL quarterback boyfriend will bring home the bacon for you."

"I fully intend on becoming a football wife," he teases, and I cackle, trying to buck him off of me. But he's still pinning me down with his weight.

We're too busy horsing around, we don't even hear the footsteps.

"Guys, I'm going to—Oh my God! I'm so sorry!"

My eyes fling to the doorway as my dad is covering his eyes with his hand, diving away from the room like it's about to blow.

Avi bursts into hysterical laughter, and I just shake my head, scoldingly. "Get the hell off me! Look what you've done… You horrified my father."

Avi slumps off of me in the bed while I rush to get up and put on pants. "Relax. I'm pretty sure he already heard us fucking the other night. You wouldn't stop screaming my name…"

I glare at him. "That is false. I was not *screaming*…"

"Uh, why do you think I stuffed my underwear in your mouth?" he sneers.

"Because you're a filthy pervert." I give him a look, to which he shrugs.

"Guilty."

"Come on." I grab him by the arm, yanking him out of bed. "Please come with me to apologize to him so he doesn't think we were just fucking with the door wide open."

Avi sighs and lets me yank him along, out of our bedroom and down the stairs.

We've been living at the house in Somerville with my dad for the past three months, and *yes*, it's been a little awkward at times. But really, I thought it was the best option for me and him to spend more time together and focus on repairing our relationship.

When I returned to school, I chose not to move back into the dorms, mainly because I can't stand being away from Avi for more than a few hours at a time. I definitely miss living with Guty, but moving into Avi and Hannah's place in Brighton while we looked for our own place just made more sense.

But then the more I thought about it, the more I started to feel bad about my dad being all alone in that big house while going through a divorce. So I decided to move back to Somerville to keep him company.

It's crazy. After all I did to avoid living in this house, and now I'm back here willingly. And I brought Avi along for the ride.

I'm still amazed that my dad went for it. I know he's been trying to be as supportive as possible, but I kind of expected him to freak out at the idea of his son sharing a bed with a guy right up the hall from him. I guess because it's Avi, it made things a little easier for him to wrap his head around.

It's just like when we lived here before college. Only now, instead of fighting, we're fucking, and instead of hating, we're loving, real hard. And sharing a bedroom… *Avi's old room, because it's the farthest from my dad's.*

We were actually about to sign a lease for a place in Davis Square when I got drafted. Now we've only got about a month left living at home before it's off to Philly. And the weirdest part is that I'm actually going to miss my dad—*something I never thought I'd say.* We've really bonded over the last three months, and it's the best feeling in the world to have a *real father*.

Though I'm not so sure he'll be missing us as much, judging by the way he's storming around the kitchen all flustered, refusing to look either of us in the eye.

"Dad…" I grin to myself at how clearly uncomfortable he is.

"I was just, uh… going to tell you that I'm running to the store," he says, picking up and putting down the same piece of mail over and over. "If you guys need anything…"

"Dad, we weren't doing anything," I tell him sincerely.

"Yea, we were just playing around," Avi adds.

My dad holds up his hand. "It's fine… I don't need to know. It's my fault, I should have… knocked."

"The door was open." I chuckle.

"I'm fine. Really." He shoots us a quick, strained smile. "Just let me know if there's anything you need at the store."

“Condoms and lube.” Avi smirks.

“Avi!” I bark, and he laughs.

“I’m just kidding…” he sighs. “We don’t use condoms.”

“Oh my God, I’m gonna staple your lips shut!” I growl.

“Alright, boys. That’s enough,” my dad scolds, grinning in amusement.

And I know why. *This feels very similar to when we were stepbrothers.*

“I left a list on the counter.” I run my fingers through my hair.

My father nods, picking up the list and looking it over. His forehead lines in concern. “This is all junk food…” He glares at Avi. “What grown man eats Pop Tarts??”

“That would be my boyfriend…” I sigh. “He eats like a pregnant seven-year-old.”

“Ew, babe.” Avi scrunches his face at me. “Weird.”

“I’m just saying, you don’t even smoke anymore, but you still act like you have the munchies twenty-four-seven.” I shoot him a look.

“When you get older, all that crap will come back to haunt you.” My dad joins in, his eyes flicking to Avi’s shirtless torso. “Say goodbye to those muscles.”

“No need to worry about that, Papa Dukes.” He grins. “This xylophone ain’t goin nowhere.” He mimics playing a xylophone on his abs, and we both roll our eyes.

“Whatever you say,” my dad mumbles, shaking his head as he leaves the house to go to the store.

“You’re a fool and a half.” I grin at Avi as he sticks his leg out to poke me in the shin with his toes.

“He’s gone… Wanna play see how many times we can make each other come in the shower?”

“Mmm… my favorite game,” I hum, sidling up to him and grinding myself on his big, deliciously muscular body.

We give him a lot of crap about what he eats, but Avi does enjoy working out. We started doing it together, and he can almost keep up with me. *I said almost.*

The sound of my phone ringing upstairs catches my ear. “Ooh, babe, I’m waiting for an important call.”

“Alright. Hop on.” He spins around, and I grin, jumping onto his back so he can piggyback me upstairs.

We're both breathlessly laughing as I answer my phone. It's my accountant. And only a brief chat later, I'm freaking giddy.

"What's up, superstar?" Avi asks.

"It's all set!" I dance around in place.

"Which thing… the townhouse or the money?"

"The money!" I beam, and he mirrors my look of zeal.

"Baby! That's so exciting." Grabbing my waist, he hugs me tight while we both shimmy around together.

A month ago, I officially decided to donate my settlement money to a few special charities. I've never wanted to spend a dime of that money on myself, but it was stupid to have it just sitting there collecting dust. So I picked my top three charities, and made arrangements with my accountant to split it in thirds and make three donations.

One to RAINN, because they were so helpful to me when I was looking to talk to someone about my abuse, one to the Trevor Project, because they do wonderful things for LGBTQ+ youths, and one to the It Gets Better Project…

Because it does. *Get better*. I'm living proof of that.

All of these charities are special and important to our community, and to survivors of abuse, and it thrills me to be able to give this money to people who need it; to people who are out there providing support, so hopefully, no one has to feel as scared and alone as I once did.

"It's such a weight off my shoulders," I murmur while Avi kisses my neck over and over. "It's like I'm closing a door that's been left open for so long…"

"I'm proud of you, baby," he croons. "You're such a strong, beautiful human."

I chuckle. "I love you."

"I love you more." He lifts his head to lock our eyes. "And the offer still stands, by the way…" My lips quirk. "Any time you wanna go piss on that asshole's grave, I'm down."

Grasping his face, I kiss him hard while he giggles into my mouth.

I know he's just teasing because he knows it makes me feel better. Or maybe he's serious, who knows.

In fact, I'm *sure* he is.

If I told Avi I wanted to piss on the grave of the asshole who abused me, he wouldn't even hesitate. He'd just hand me a jug of water and say, "Fill

the tank, baby.”

Because that’s who he is. He’s my support system, my lifeline.

My stepbrother I *hated*, turned porn co-star, turned friend, turned absolutely ridiculous, sexy, perfect love of my life.

He’s my savior, my first and my only.

From eagle wings to angel wings… he’s my Avi.

Dancing on the field of my heart.

OceanofPDF.com

AVI'S EPILOGUE

Backwardz_Avi: My man is SLAYING. Welcome to Philly, baby! #FlyEaglesFly
MissBea21: So proud of you both<3
Zeb_for_Kween: Backwardz_Avi, OF friends & family discount! Hook a sister up!
The.Theo.Reeves: Not that I'm jealous… but stoppit
Sammy_Gutz: Yo Backwardz, show us the Eagle moves!
Frankie_Says_Relax: Backwardz_Avi I told you His_Baby wanted to kiss you ;)

6 Months Later…

Today is a very special occasion.

I've been planning and scheming for months, preparing to make this a night to remember. So far, everything is in place.

We just need one final ingredient…

The birthday boy.

It's Kyran's birthday, and I've managed to set up the best surprise party *ever* for him. After all, you only turn twenty once, and my boyfriend also happens to be playing for the NFL on his twentieth birthday. *Not many people can say that.*

We've been living in Philly for almost five months, though it feels like it's been five *days*. The time is flying by because every day is crazy, but honestly… I love it.

Philadelphia is a great little city. It reminds me of Boston in a way. Nowhere near as big or loud or chaotic as New York, but still with plenty to do. *And tons of real-ass mofos.*

The NFL has kept Kyran super busy. He was fortunate enough to be drafted for training camp, so he was able to spend tons of time with his team, getting to know everyone and learning the ins and outs of the NFL.

His coach is… well, let's just say he's a widely known hard-ass. He's a loud, pushy Italian guy from New York who brought the Eagles to the

Super Bowl last season with his no-nonsense attitude and aggressive coaching style.

The first-string quarterback has been with them for a few years, and he's one of the best in the league. An up-and-comer, just like Kyran. Ky's not expecting much on-field time during the regular season, but he's just excited to be here.

Unfortunately, I'm not sure the Eagles QB feels the same way…

It's your standard jealousy. Feeling like the new, younger, hot commodity is going to replace you. Of course, Kyran has no intention of stepping on anyone's toes. He's way too sweet and respectful for that. But I guess the dude doesn't care much, because he already sort of has it in for Ky.

Still, it's nothing my man can't handle. He's the most badass person I've ever met, and he'd never let a little rivalry run him off course. It just means he'll be working extra hard to prove himself this season, which in turn, means we might not get to spend as much time together as we're used to.

When we became an official couple nine months ago, we were all over each other twenty-four-seven, and it was… *what's the word? Oh, right. Fucktastic*.

Seriously, it was nothing but nonstop sex and talking, dates and adventures, laughing and enjoying every second of one another to the point that our friends started calling us *Kyvi*. Attached at the hip. Or maybe somewhere more salacious. *Wink wink.*

Things didn't change right away when we moved. In fact, despite how rigorous the training schedule was over the summer, we still managed to find time to do all kinds of fun things. We decorated the townhouse together, explored Philly… We even took a week-long road trip across the country to see all kinds of sights and make new memories for our palm lines.

It was an absolute blast, but as soon as the pre-season started, our time together began to dwindle. I can't be mad about it, though. I knew what to expect when Kyran was drafted. He made a choice, and even though he didn't have to, he made me a part of the decision.

It was either stay in school, or quit to follow his dream. Seems like a no-brainer, but there are obvious risks to the latter. The percentage of football players drafted to the NFL who actually end up with contracts isn't very high, and being a free agent is like living in a constant state of stress. If you

end up not performing, you could be tossed out with nothing to fall back on. Not to mention, Bridget was totally right when she was talking about the injury statistics in the NFL. It's staggering to the point of almost downright irresponsible.

But after hours of talking it over in bed, we came to the conclusion that he'd be crazy not to chase his dream. Graduating with a business degree doesn't guarantee you a good job either. Really, *nothing* does.

There are no guarantees in this life. It's about how hard you're willing to work, how much of your mental sanity you're willing to sacrifice, and how determined you are to make it to the top. And Kyran Harbor is by far the most determined motherfucker I've ever met. If anyone can do this, it's him.

Suffice it to say, the stress and lack of time together is worth it for him pursuing the dream he's had since he was a little boy.

The team's publicist had a few concerns regarding the fact that Kyran is a bit of an internet celebrity, what with our relationship content constantly going viral. But they ultimately decided it was good publicity… I think because they're always looking for diversity, and having an openly gay quarterback might make them look good. Or they're desperately trying not to seem homophobic.

Either way, we were given the green light to keep doing what we're doing, as long as Kyran doesn't appear in anymore videos for the Fans… Not that they could prove it was even him to begin with, though everyone knows it was. But we don't really care, and we wouldn't have stopped being openly in love if they'd had a problem with it, anyway.

No one gets to tell us to tone down our rainbows. *We're broadcasting that shit, whether you like it or not.*

We've got millions of followers on social media at this point, between Instagram, Twitter, and our cute little joint TikTok account we made, though I personally find that app to be the most ridiculous thing ever. But it's all in fun. We like to kiss and cuddle and tease each other in videos, and apparently, our fans like watching it. *So yay us.*

I still make solo content on my OnlyFans, and between that and the Patreon I started for my art, I'm bringing in enough income to finance my art career. I have a website where I sell my stuff, originals and prints. I was even approached by a local business to do another mural.

Yes, things are going great for us, but I do miss my man. We haven't gone to town on each other, so to speak, in two days because Kyran's been so exhausted from traveling and the excessive training. It's worth it, though… His body is absolutely *bangin'*. Although it does make the whole *no sex* thing that much more difficult when his muscles are like a scrumptious dessert I want to spend hours licking.

But this plan I have set up should hopefully rectify the situation. He has the night off after day practice, so I've arranged this entire elaborate surprise party for him. We'll celebrate his birthday, give him a chance to finally let loose a little, and by the end of the evening, I'll have his legs in the air.

Who knows… maybe we'll even manage to sneak off for a quick rendezvous in the bathroom while the party is still happening. *Because let's be real here, I'm not sure I can wait until everyone leaves.*

Partygoers are arriving, trickling in slowly, but it's fine. Ky's out for an early dinner with his parents, who came down just for the day to see him on his birthday. *Also part of the plan to keep him out of the house while I get everything set up.*

The food has been catered by Kyran's favorite local Japanese place… We have an entire sushi bar set up with guys actually rolling sushi here in our house, along with a chef preparing appetizers and entrees in our massive, opulent kitchen.

I have a bar set up with a mixologist mixing fancy cocktails, and to top it all off, I had a custom donut cake made specially by Federal Donuts, the best damn donut shop in the entire world.

I'm telling you. These things are so good, even Kyran splurges to have one every Sunday.

The party is all set to go off without a hitch, and now I'm just waiting for the text from Tom to let me know when Kyran is on his way back home so we can all hide.

I'm so excited I'm freaking giddy. *I can't wait to see the look on his face.*

"You really outdid yourself, bae," Frankie says, sliding over and wrapping her arms around my waist. "Kyran is gonna flip his lid."

Smiling down at her, I hug her into my side, pressing a kiss in her newly teal hair. "I'm so glad you could make it."

“Are you kidding??” Bea squeals as she stomps over in some super sexy knee-high boots that almost put her tiny self eye-level with the rest of our chins, tugging Theo along by the hand. “We wouldn’t miss it for the world!”

I grin at her and Theo. I don’t think they’re officially a couple, because my good friend Bea doesn’t really consider herself the *relationship type*. That said, they spend an awful lot of time together. I’m not sure *what’s* going on with them, but I guess we’ll have to wait and find out.

“I can’t wait to see my boy.” Theo grins. “You’ve been hogging him for way too long.”

I gasp. “Excuse me… what Kyran and I do in the privacy of our own bedroom is our business.”

Frankie cackles while Theo shoots me a horrified look.

“What did you get Kyran for his birthday?” Micah asks, trotting over with Zeb, both of them double-fisting elaborate cocktails.

“I’m gonna go out on a limb and guess a riding crop with matching ball-gag.” Zeb smirks. “You know they like it freaky.”

“Oh, please,” Frankie scoffs. “Those two couldn’t handle it.” I frown at her, and she sneers, “But if you ever want me to give you a tutorial in proper orgasm denial, just say the word. I’m sure it’d be useful for your boy.”

“Okay, that’s too much information,” Theo grumbles, sipping his drink. “And how would you know, anyway?” He squints at Frankie.

“Let’s just say, I was meat in the sandwich of the two of them before Kyran realized he was a vegetarian.” She beams.

Chuckling, I roll my eyes. “Yes, bae, you got us together. Thank you so much, we’re all very grateful.” Turning to Micah and Zeb, I snatch a drink out of Zeb’s hand and sip it while he scowls. “But to answer your question, I did get Kyran something very special for his birthday, and I can’t wait to give it to him.”

“You know, just putting a bow on your dick doesn’t constitute a *gift*, right?” Micah smirks, and I purse my lips at him.

“Oh my God, no!” Zeb gasps. “You got him a diamond ring, didn’t you?? You’re gonna propose!” He jumps and claps excitedly.

“I get it.” Bea nods. “I’d wanna lock that down if I were you.”

“I’m not going to propose,” I scoff. “We’re too young to get married.” My stomach starts twisting, and I feel suddenly twitchy at the thought. “Not

that I even think Kyran would say yes…”

I’m chewing on my lip, staring into my glass while Frankie chirps, “Are you kidding?? Of course he would! That sweet little slice of pumpkin pie is obsessed with you, and you know it.”

My lips curl, but I force myself to smother it. “You think…?”

“Why, you’re not seriously thinking of proposing, are you??” Theo asks nervously. As if this somehow affects him.

“No,” I huff, and they all stare at me. “I’m not!”

“Good, because marriage is a total sham,” Theo grunts, then downs the rest of his drink.

My eyebrow cocks at him, but before I can pry into what his deal might be, the front door flings open and a loud voice booms.

“Who ordered the stripper?!” Guty hollers, and every face turns in his direction as he laughs and claps. “No need to fret, amigos. The party is officially here!”

The group of us are all chuckling, Theo rushing over to greet his friend while the rest of the guests murmur amongst themselves, most likely wondering where this exceptionally loud and eccentric presence came from.

“Hey, Backwardz.” Guty grins as he waltzes over, elbowing a grunt out of me. “Thanks for the invite. I haven’t been to Philly in years.”

“I’m glad you could make it,” I hum, rubbing my side. *Ow… He might’ve cracked a rib.* “Kyran is gonna freak when he sees you.”

“I miss my baby Nueve.” He pouts.

“He’s not *your* baby.” Zeb smirks at me before turning his flirty eyes on Guty.

Guty’s head cocks, and he narrows his gaze at Zeb.

“Well, grab yourself a cocktail and some food if you want,” I cut in, grabbing Guty by the arm and showing him where everything is. “Kyran should be on his way home any minute. And I think we’re just waiting for…”

The door opens and we look up to see Bridget grinning and waving as she enters the room. “Hiii!”

“It’s the Bridge!” I gasp, peeking at Micah, who shouts with me. “*The Bridge!*”

We’re both laughing hysterically.

“Um… what?” Theo looks confused.

And Frankie, Zeb, and Bea all explain in unison. “Mothman.”

Hugging Bridget, we squeal at the reunion before I introduce her to our friends.

“Okay,” I sigh with a clap. “Who wants a tour while we wait for the birthday boy?”

“Ooh! Me!”

Bea and Zeb both shimmy around excitedly. Frankie takes Bridget and Micah on each arm, following along, while Guty and Theo whisper to each other about which of Kyran’s teammates from the Philly Eagles are here.

I proceed to walk the group of them around our two-floor townhouse, showing them the set-up while they *ooh* and *ahh*. Not to brag or anything, but this place is fucking boss. Kyran and I set it up like the ultimate bachelor pad, only for a couple. We’ve got a home theater, our own gym, four bedrooms, a full bath with an attached master, home office, a kitchen that would probably even have Gordon Ramsay stuttering, and an outdoor deck with a barbecue enclosure and a hot tub.

It’s absolutely *insane*. The kind of place you dream about having, and Kyran and I have it… Two twenty-year-olds who didn’t even finish college.

God bless America.

I’m showing Micah my library of conspiracy theory books and our memorabilia case when my phone buzzes in my pocket. It’s a text from Tom.

“Oh shit.” My heart immediately starts thudding. “Kyran’s on his way home. He’ll be here in fifteen minutes.”

I corral them all out of the room so we can get ready while Zeb tugs on my sleeve. “Can I please come live with you?”

I shake my head, laughing.

“Seriously, bro. This place is loco…” Guty says.

“That’s that NFL money.” Theo grins.

“And that OnlyFans money,” Zeb sings, winking at me.

“Aww, I recognize so many of these rooms from your reels!” Bea squeals, taking my hand. “You guys are so cute together. Your posts are the highlight of my day. I’m always like, *I know them*!”

I can’t help but chuckle as heat rushes to my face.

“I like the one when Kyran was hiding your junk food.” Frankie giggles.

“My favorite was his reaction to you ranting about the Hudson Valley sightings,” Micah cackles.

“Really? I’m partial to the shower videos…” Zeb murmurs.

I glare at him, though my lips are curved into a knowing smirk. “Those are just for the Fans.” I wink at him, and he mimics a kiss.

“Alright, everyone!” I shout, turning down the music to address the party. “Ten-minute warning!”

Rushing off to the kitchen, I check in with the chef and the servers to make sure they’re all set to be quiet for a few minutes for the surprise. All the guests get into position in the living room, and my adrenaline is spiked as I watch the front door security camera for Kyran’s car.

Only a few minutes of me freaking out later, his Mercedes SUV pulls up along the curb. Frankie dims the lights while everyone crouches down, and my pulse is clanking, excitement buzzing with a dash of nerves.

Hopefully, he doesn’t hate this.… As long as I’ve known him, he’s never had a surprise party before. I’m not second-guessing myself… I’m sure he’ll be happy.

Okay, maybe I’m second-guessing myself a little.…

But there’s no going back now because he’s walking up the steps and unlocking the door.

“Baby!” I hear him shouting as soon as he’s inside, his footsteps clomping through the foyer. “I’m telling you… I’ve had a day. I need a beer, a bath, and that dick. Not necessarily in that order…”

I’m covering my mouth to keep the chuckles in as he rounds the corner, and Frankie flips on the lights.

“Surprise!”

We all jump up, screaming and cheering, people blowing those noisemakers I left everywhere.

Kyran stumbles backward in shock. But I don’t even have time to swoon over the flush in his cheeks from what he unwittingly just said in front of forty guests plus an entire restaurant staff…

Because I’m gasping in horror and rushing over to him.

“Kyran! What happened to your *face?!*”

He has a nasty black eye. His left eye is surrounded by black and blue, and now I feel awful because all these people are staring at him like this.

“Aww… angel,” he sighs, grinning and running his hands up my chest while I’m fussing over his eye. “You did this for me??”

“Yea, yea… But what happened to you?” I whimper.

He ignores me, smiling excitedly as he kisses my lips, then looks over my shoulder. “This is amazing, you guys! I had no idea… You scared the

shit out of me."

Everyone laughs, and Kyran grabs me by the hand. Someone turns the music back on, and the party resumes, but I'm still focused on the state of his eye.

"Baby brother!" Bridget shrieks, hugging him, though Kyran doesn't let go of my hand. "Happy birthday!"

"Brooklyn Bridge!" He beams at her. "I can't believe you came all the way from Cali!"

"Well, Avi sent a private plane for me on the Eagles's dime." She smirks. His face drops, and she laughs out loud. "I'm just kidding, Ky jelly!"

He breathes out a relieved laugh, shaking his head.

"Nueve!" Guty launches himself at Kyran, hugging him hard. "I'm so glad to see you, papi. Happy freaking birthday."

"Thanks for being here," Kyran hums, peeking at me. "You got my best friend here?! I love you so much."

"Hey, killa," Theo hugs him, frowning as he pulls back. "What the hell happened to your eye?"

"You get in a bar fight or something?" Guty asks, but Kyran waves him off.

"No, no. It's nothing. I'm fine." He smiles, giving hugs and cheek kisses to all of our friends.

"Was this a hate crime??" Zeb asks, touching his face while Kyran backs up.

"No! Guys, I'm *fine*. Just a little… occupational hazard." He grins.

"So… beer, bath, and dick, huh?" Frankie smirks.

Kyran rolls his eyes, but then he clasps my jaw, kissing my mouth three times in a row. "I love you so much for this. I've never had a surprise party before…"

"I'm glad you love it," I sigh, frowning. Lowering my voice, I ask, "Baby, seriously. What happened?"

His smile wavers a bit as his Adam's apple bobs. He glances left and right, maybe to make sure none of his teammates are within earshot before he whispers, "It was Payne."

"Payne did this to you?!" I gasp, and he glares at me to keep it down.

"Wait, hold on… The Eagles quarterback… *Jalen Payne* punched you in the face??" Theo crowds us, obviously having overheard.

Kyran scowls at me before answering, “He didn’t punch me in the face. It was an *accident*.”

“How do you accidentally give someone a black eye??” Bea squeaks.

“It happens in football.” Guty shrugs.

“See? Exactly,” Kyran says calmly, though I’m not satisfied.

First the rivalry, now this?? I’m not liking this Jalen Payne character one bit.

“We were at practice, and we were both going for the ball and he just sort of… elbowed me in the eye,” Kyran mumbles. “It’s no big deal.”

My brows furrow as I chew on the inside of my cheek, staring at the bruising on his beautiful face. He takes my hand and places it over his heart, brushing my hair back with his fingers.

“Baby… I’m telling you. I’m fine.” His tone is placating. “I don’t want you worrying.”

“Of course I’m going to worry, Kyran,” I mutter. “Accident or not, I wanna murder that asshole for hurting you.”

Bea, Zeb, and Frankie all go *awww* in the background, but I’m not paying attention to them.

Kyran smiles. “Perfect.” He kisses my lips softly. “Gorgeous.” He kisses me again. “Sexy.” The kisses trail down my jaw and over to my ear. “Delicious, candy-coated sex machine.” I rumble a laugh while he licks my ear. “Do we have to wait, or can I get my birthday dick right now?”

God, I fucking love this man.

Worry or not, it’s all worth it for him.

“How about I get you a drink, and something to eat.” My fingers graze his lower back. “You go mingle for a bit… and I’ll meet you in the bedroom in twenty minutes for part one of your birthday orgasm package.”

“Mmm…” he rumbles. “How many parts are there?”

“As many as your body can stand before you require an IV drip of electrolytes.” I smirk, and he laughs.

He pulls himself off me with a satisfied sigh, hazel eyes shining with love. *That right there… that’s what I wanted to see.* All the planning and everything I put into this party…

All I needed was that one look.

Kyran makes his rounds, talking to everyone and thanking them for coming while I get him food and a cocktail. He’s genuinely amazed and

flabbergasted by the set-up, pretty much in seventh heaven over the food from his favorite restaurant.

A few minutes later, I sneak off to the bedroom with his birthday present. I actually got him two things, but I want to give them to him in private. And not because they're sex acts. *That'll be a happy side-effect.*

When I hear footsteps, I sit down on our giant bed, running my fingers over the soft fabric of the comforter. It reminds me of all the times we spent tangled in the sheets of my dorm room bed, showing each other with our bodies how we felt in our hearts.

It's hard to believe how far we've come in just a year. It doesn't even feel real. I spend all my days walking in a fog. My entire life with this man is a dream I never want to wake from.

"Hey…" he whispers, stepping into the room, that easy grin resting on his pillowed lips. I love how much it's become a permanent fixture on his face.

He's not the boy I used to know as my stepbrother. The boy who fought with me and scowled at me, who hated me because he was hurt and scared and angry inside. The evolution of Kyran Harbor is something I'll always cherish, because I got to watch it happen before my eyes. I got to see it behind closed doors when we were together in secret. I watched him grow into the amazing man he is today.

A man who loves me out in the open, without fear. A man who survived something awful and still laughs and loves and gives.

A man who taught me who *I* truly am. Because if it wasn't for Kyran Harbor, I'd still be lost myself.

I owe everything to this man, and the journey we took together… For the fans.

"Is that for me?" He trots over and takes a seat next to me on the bed, eyeing the wrapped gift box in my hands.

I nod, handing it to him. "Happy birthday, baby."

Kyran tears into the paper, opening the box carefully. He pulls out the leather-bound book, peeking at me. I bite my lip.

He opens it, his eyes wide and sparkling as he reads the inside cover. It says, *For Kyran, my baby… Love, your biggest fan.*

Turning the pages slowly, he looks through all the intricate stuff I put together just for him. The book is full of pictures of us I took for the fans,

drawings I did of him, even screenshots of some of the hilarious comments and DMs fans used to send us.

"Baby… this is incredible," he breathes.

"This is the story of us," I whisper, playing with his hair.

He turns his face to blink at me. "Everything we did…"

"For me and you, beautiful." I grin, kissing him softly.

He groans into my mouth, hungrily advancing like he wants so much more. But he stops himself, long enough to finish looking at his gift. The last page has a picture of me getting a tattoo… and his face whips in my direction.

I laugh, lifting my shirt over my head. Sitting right above my heart is the ink I just got this morning. His name in script, and underneath it, it says *Always only mine.*

He looks amazed as he murmurs, "Can… Can I… kiss it?"

Tugging my lip between my teeth, I give him a little nod and he drops his lips to it, placing a soft kiss on his name. He grins up at me. "It takes like Vaseline."

I laugh out loud. "That's Aquaphor. I just got it today."

He chuckles, closing the book and moving it off to the side. Then he crawls over me until I recline beneath him. "I'm gonna need that orgasm now, angel."

"Mmm… we'll have to make it quick. And quiet."

"I can do one of those." He grins, and I hum a laugh, gripping his ass.

He's rubbing our hardening cocks together through our pants when he peers right, frowning. "Does the damn cat always have to be on the bed when I'm trying to get slutty?"

I snort. "How about we take this party to the bathroom? I'll bend you over and make you tremble…"

"Mm… sounds like a party."

Twenty minutes later, we both come back downstairs, chafed, disheveled, and flushed, smiling like two fools in love, which is exactly what we are.

The party is amazing, and when Kyran blows out the candles on his donut cake, he narrows his gaze at me.

"You didn't spit on the cake, did you?" He smirks, teasingly.

"You bet your sweet ass I did." I wink.

The cake is being served, and we're all sitting together in the living room, our tight-knit little group of jocks, weirdos… *family*. We managed to form this friendship, despite our differences, just like me and Kyran.

I love these people. No matter what happens in the future, distance or not, they'll always be my crew.

Everywhere we're together is a party we're making better.

"So, Avi… any interest in becoming the Eagle here in Philly?" Theo asks with a smile.

Kyran and I peek at each other, grinning.

"The guy who took over as Baldwin after you left is so *not* funny," Guty grumbles, and I laugh. "He doesn't even Moonwalk!"

Kyran takes my hand and kisses it. "Sorry, guys. I stole Baldwin and brought him with me."

Grasping his face, I press a slow kiss on his lips, humming, "I love you forever, my baby."

"I love you forever, backwardz angel." He grins.

"Get a room!" Frankie hollers.

"No no…" Zeb chuckles. "They already did that."

Kyran smiles at me, biting his lip. "For the fans?"

My forehead drops to his and I whisper, "For the fans."

For *us*.

The End…

If you or someone you know has suffered abuse and would like to speak with someone, call this number:

800-656-4673

Or go to www.rainn.org/resources

LGBTQ+ resources:

The Trevor Project
Find support at www.thetrevorproject.org

It Gets Better Project
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You're not alone. If you ever need to talk, I'm always available. Email me at authornylak@gmail.com or DM me on social media. Just know that you're beautiful and badass. You're loved, valued, and worthy of the gifts of this life.

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A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR...

That's a wrap!

Can you totally imagine Avi calling out "cut" when they're finished?? 'Cause I can.

So, I'm going to try not to make this too long, since the book itself was already, like, *Lord Of The Rings* length. But there are things I want to talk about with you folks, because this story, more than any of my others, contains *mass amounts* of Nyla K.

It is literally *for the fans,* and if you're a regular reader of mine, I want you to know how special this book is to my life, and how awesome I think you are for reading and enjoying it. And if this is your first book by me, well, I hope Kyran and Avi sucked you in (giggity) to the world of Nyla K!

Since we're talking about me, let's start there. This book ties into my actual life in a lot of ways. Firstly, the setting. Boston, Massachusetts. It's where I'm from!

'Cause I love that dirty water… bow bow. Boston, you're my home!

I was actually singing that by the way.

Born and raised in central Mass, I went to school in Beantown, and I actually lived in Malden my freshman year of college. So all that Malden stuff from Chapter One is fresh outta the Nyla K biography. Our place was right by the Orange Line, and Rosemary was, in fact, our crazy landlord who would mow the lawn in her funny straw hat. Hilarious. My best friend/former roommate will die when he reads that part. The same goes for all the Somerville references. Some good times spent in that area, man!

Also, I'm sure you've noticed that I apparently can't get through a book without mentioning Brooklyn, or my love for New York City—Avi's hometown, and the city that changed my life. Boston is my *home,* but New York, Brooklyn in particular, will always have my heart.

Other Nyla K Easter eggs… Mercedes! It's briefly mentioned that Avi's mom, Hannah, works at a Mercedes dealership in Boston. That was my job for fourteen years before I left to become a full-time author. And because of that, I have immense loyalty to the brand. But it's justified, because Benzes are the best lol. And Kyran loves his rental so much, he ends up getting one of his own when they move to Philly.

I loved throwing in references to the Middle East, as my family is Syrian, and I had one of the most amazing experiences staying there, and visiting Lebanon.

The Mendon Drive-In… *Oh*, I love it so much. Kyran expressing his memories of snuggling up in the car at the drive-in is an actual piece of my childhood I worked into the story. Just like the movies! The conversation between Ky and Avi about their top five was very important to me… One, because I feel like our favorite movies say a lot about us as people—just like our taste in music does. And two, because Ky and Avi's favorite movies are literally my favorite movies. I mean, Avi's top five is my *actual* top five.

Rounding out the Nyla K Easter eggs for now, though, I have to mention one very special little Burmese fluff ball… named *Robin*.

My loyal readers/followers know that Robin is my real-life cat. And I can't lie… She's my everything. Recently, my poor little baby has been experiencing some health issues. She had surgery a few months back, and it was a really tough time for us. She came out of it feeling great, but the unfortunate truth I barely even want to admit is that I know she won't be with us forever.

Putting Robin in the book is my way of changing that. Now she'll be immortalized forever, as Avi's sweet little sidekick, just like she's been for me. Any time I need to vent, or when I'm anxious or upset, she's always there to cuddle and make me feel better with her cute little meows and the silly things she does. So I made her that presence for Aviel, too. Honestly, when I wrote the line, "I'm gonna call her Robin," I was squealing and tearing up. And of course, she just stared at me like, "What are you freaking out about this time??" *She's like that.*

My Robin is actually not named after Batman's sidekick, but you know I had to throw those Batman references in there. It just wouldn't be a Nyla K book without mention of Batman, aliens, cryptids, conspiracy theories, cults or true crime. Seriously, this book is lousy with inside jokes, and if

you get *any* of them, you're either a kindred spirit of mine, or you're a true FAN. And either way, it's incredible.

If you don't get the jokes now, but someday something pops up and you're like, *"Oh, shit. Nyla K mentioned that in her book!"* then I've truly done my job.

Kyran and Avi truly are two very different halves of my actual personality. Avi is the inner Nyla. The weirdo, arty emo kid who smiles and laughs things off, when really he feels a little insecure inside. The dreamer who's loyal to a fault, with corny jokes and even cornier dance moves… Who believes in weird things and loves rock from the nineties and early two-thousands. *Fun fact, my mom, like Hannah, used to play Nirvana and Weezer and Alice In Chains for us when I was a kid, and it became some of my favorite music for that reason.*

Avi is truly *me*. But then Kyran is the other half… The control-freak who needs everything to be exactly *so*, otherwise the entire world feels like it's spinning out.

I am this way because of my own personal past; my own trauma. And no, it's nothing like what Kyran went through, and I thank the God I believe in for that. Still, the stuff I've been through attributed to the way I am, similarly to the way Kyran's did, in this sense. And for that reason more than any others, I *love* the progression of Kyran's character.

The recovery he went through, between confronting his past and coming to terms with his sexuality, finally pushing past that crippling denial and being the *real* Kyran, is like the freshest of breaths. It was *amazing* to feel that alongside him.

Writing about Kyran's trauma actually felt reminiscent of Darian's struggles from *Serpent In White*. Those of you who have read that book know what I mean… And while Avi's rage wasn't quite as detrimental as Drake's was in *Serpent*, I feel like the support was still there. The way Drake would do *anything* for Darian, in the name of being his lifeline, especially when they were kids, reminds me of how Avi just wants to love and support Kyran, no matter what. That kind of meaningful connection is my favorite thing to write for my characters.

I think it's safe to say that as soon as Avi comes to terms with his feelings for Kyran, he's all in it. It's just the way his personality works. But that doesn't mean it's *easy* for him, especially with how much Kyran has always hated him, how they've clashed over the years, and how closed of a

book Kyran's always been… It was a tough thing to go into; falling for the *enemy*, so to speak. But in true Aviel fashion, he dove into it headfirst, because he's just that kind of sky-high-flying beautiful unicorn man.

Obviously for Kyran, it's all much more complicated. And that makes sense. The whole time, Kyran is *craving* a real connection without even knowing it. All the anger, the denial, the self-loathing he experiences serves as a camouflage so deep, he barely even recognizes that it's an act anymore. It takes one very special goofball to start slowly peeling back his layers… But once it happens, it's magic.

Another big part of Kyran's trauma recovery that we need to mention is the stuff with his parents. Listen… I've written some crap parents. But Kyran's are really up there on the list of terrible ones. I mean, the way they behaved is fully deplorable.

But one of the more satisfying moments in this book's conflict resolution was the redemption of Thomas Harbor. To be honest, him coming around and supporting Kyran wasn't part of the original storyline. But when I was writing that scene, where Kyran confronts them in the restaurant… It just happened. When Tom comes outside and hugs Kyran… I was *bawling* because it was unfolding before my own eyes, totally unplanned.

The thing about Tom is that he's always regretted the way he treated Ky. He was never happy about their relationship. Kyran assumed it was because his father was ashamed of him, but in reality, he was ashamed of *himself*, and he just handled it completely wrong.

Writing Ky and Avi moving back in with him in the epilogue made my heart happy. The epilogues as a whole were adorable, I was in constant tears of joy. But that part in particular was really nice.

My favorite though? Kyran's surprise birthday party. It's while I was writing it that I decided there's *no possible way* I'm done with these characters. Their story has been so meaningful to me, and writing them falling in love was everything I needed, after all the tension, the hate and the hard times. They're fun and sexy and hilarious, and I just feel like I could write them for the rest of my life.

So I think you should officially know that I will *definitely* be writing more of Kyran and Avi… Something like a continuation novella, because I think we all want to see more of their adventures now that Kyran is playing for the NFL, right?!

Speaking of which, let's talk sports real quick.

I love football. Like, I *love* it. It's my favorite sport by far, and probably the only sport I would ever write in romance. And being from New England, sneaking in Patriots references was a must. I just had to do it. *Brady be with you.*

All of that is to say, I'm a fan of NFL football. But in the interest of being totally honest here… I'm a noob with college football. I've watched some, and researched a bit for this book. But damn, dude… It's crazy confusing! There are just *so* many teams, all these different conferences and bowls... It was so hard for me to follow, eventually I abandoned ship and started making things up a little.

I'm not sure which conference plays who, or which teams play in which bowl. I couldn't get my brain to compute it. So basically, I chose the teams that Kyran and the BC Eagles would play based on the names and places I thought sounded cool. *LOL. I wish I was kidding.*

I knew I wanted the Eagles to play in the Rose Bowl, in California, because that's where Bridget lives, and they needed to go out west to meet her. But outside of that, I literally scrolled through a list of teams and just picked random ones. It was fun for me, but in case you're a big college football fan and you stop and say, *wait… that would never happen*. Yea, you're probably right.

But this is *my* version of reality, okay?

Here's another fun football fact about the book…

Kyran getting drafted to the NFL was always the plan. But I couldn't send him to the Patriots. It was too easy. I wanted him to go either to Philly or to New York—The Giants, obviously, since the Jets are trash lol.

I sat down to watch the Giants playing the Eagles in the playoffs and said, *"Okay. Whoever wins this game will draft Kyran Harbor."* And then the Eagles *destroyed* the Giants.

So Kyran went from Eagles to Eagles… *It's kismet!*

Too bad the Philly Eagles couldn't take the Super Bowl this year. Maybe next time, with Ky on their side ;)

Writing the football scenes in this book was a real blast, like I said, because I'm a fan. Hopefully, even if you're not a football fan you were able to enjoy and visualize the games; the excitement, the lights, the noise and extreme fandom. But mostly… our dancing eagle!

Having Avi as the mascot just made the whole thing that much better. Cards on the table, I was very pleased with myself when I came up with the idea. I know when I say football romance, most people expect either two football players, or one football player and an emo kid who doesn't care. But no. This was Avi's way in.

And he's very much a born mascot; a carefree weirdo who loves to mess around. He's the *perfect* Baldwin, and who knows! Maybe he'll find another excuse to put on a costume and dance around for his man in the future.

Let me also just mention that if you weren't aware… My inspiration for Avi is a delicious morsel of a man named Alejo Pino, affectionately known as *Hot Alex* in our Discord. His OnlyFans is what inspired me to write Avi, and in-turn, Kyran and Avi's story. You should totally check him out, and swoon over his content with us.

Lastly, I feel like I need to mention the religious aspect to this book. Again, if you're a fan of mine, you know there may be trash-talking of conforming to societal norms. My own relationship with a *higher power*, if you will, is very much what Hannah describes to Avi when he's upset and breaking down over Kyran having left.

I sincerely hope I haven't offended anyone or made it feel like I'm *bashing* organized religion with this book. At the same time, I have to stay genuine. Many parts of organized religion—the rituals, the traditions, the draconian rules and regulations—feel every bit as hive-minded as described by Kyran and Avi in the book.

But being *spiritual*… Truly believing in *God*, not as a bearded old man sitting in the clouds judging people, but as the mystical and unknown forces of the universe, is what true *faith* is all about. The fact that science can only explain so much, and the rest is up to our wide-open minds to even attempt to fathom is pretty incredible.

The truth is that no one really *knows* what the higher power actually *is*, the extent of after-life or the measures of what controls the path we're all on. To believe otherwise is, in my opinion, narcissistic and foolish. None of us know the answers, and having real faith in the earth, and ourselves as moving parts, is a way to feel connected to something bigger.

Again, I hope this came across in the writing; not to judge anyone who was raised a certain way, but to point out that despite how incredibly different we all are, at our core, we're all the same. Hating people based on

any external factor is ridiculous, but it's an unfortunate part of humanity. Religion has been dividing people since pretty much forever, and it's really sad. Because like I said, at the heart of it, we're all just *people*, breathing the same air on this spinning rock that could very well be a simulation, or a figment of our imaginations… A particle in some infinite being's snow globe. ;-D

Okay, I'm not gonna go all Nyla K-crazy on you right now, but I'm just saying. Sit back, open your third eye and think about it. *Or don't, whatever you wanna do, boo.*

Anywayzies, those are the Nyla tidbits for you. The explanations you didn't ask for. As stressful as writing this book was for me at times, it's still one of my favorite things I've ever written, mainly because it's just so fun. Something that, in theory, could have been similar to other tropes or stories, but is so inherently different, because that's how I do. *I gotta.*

From start to finish, I loved writing the tension, Avi's jokes, their group of friends and all their shenanigans. The parties, the failed threesome attempt, the playing, the dancing, the texting, the OnlyFans recording, the social media comments!

In case you weren't aware, all of the comment captions at the top of each chapter were, in fact, written by fans! They were all submitted by readers and some author friends, and including them in the book made this all the more *real*. A perfect little cherry… or should I say *Twizzler*, on top of the sundae of this book.

I've just loved every second of being with these boys, and I hope you did too. I hope you're excited for more of Kyran, Avi, and the group. For more fun, more football, more love, and even more scorching sex.

More *fans*. 'Cause you know… it's all for you.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Wowzies! Okay, I need to acknowledge and give some praise to a few people on this bad boy.

First and foremost, I must always shout out my awesome family. I have a tendency to become a bridge-troll when I'm on my insane, self-inflicted deadlines, so I have to thank them for always being patient with me. For adhering to the rules written on the chalkboard in the kitchen… *Do not disturb Nyla until after such-and-such date*.

For all his bumbling craziness, Patrick really gets the pressure I'm under—again, mostly revolving around my own neuroses—and for that, I have to say *thank you*. Thank you for listening to me blather about these characters for hours on end like they're my real-life children. You and Robin are my rocks, and my comforts, and for that, I'm so very grateful.

I also have to say thank you to my team of hustlers—Amber, my amazing PA, for always encouraging me, keeping me sane, and dealing with my incessant manic bullshit. Frances for being one of my best friends in the world and always having my back (Yes, technically Frankie is named after her, because she's just *that* awesome). And Karie, the newest member of Team Nyla, for stepping into my madness without missing a beat, and helping me with things I'm physically unwilling and unable to do myself. You guys absolutely rule, and you're the wind beneath my wings. (*Get it?*)

O-Kay-Kay-*Kay*—my editor… You have by far the hardest job of all. Because you have to tell me all the ways I could condense my long-ass books, knowing damn-well I'm not actually going to do it. Some might say you enable me… It would be me. I say that. But it's all good, because you're not really an editor, and I'm not really a writer who's going to conform to any sort of structural *guidelines*. So we're a match made in heaven. Or hell. You're the Frankie in this situation. Now, go attempt a

threesome with stepbrothers who won’t stop bickering because they secretly want to kiss each other.

To Mackenzie… Nice Girl Naughty Edits CEO. You bad bad *baddie*. Graphic extraordinaire and polisher of my manuscripts. I know I say this every time, but I have no actual idea what I would do without you. You’ve become such a pivotal member of my team, if you ever leave me, I’ll be inconsolable. Like Avi with no weed and no Kyran. A total grumpy ass bitch. So please, for the good of humanity, please keep being my Twizzler straw. *LOL. Is that weird?*

I also need to give a massive shoutout to Ashlee O’Brien, otherwise known as the MUTHAFUCKIN KWEEN, Ashes & Vellichor. The designer of this unique, incredible, elaborate book cover. Dawg, it’s been two years and I still can’t even process how talented you are. I gave you a few haphazard paragraphs of rambling ideas and you somehow turned that into one of the most creative covers I’ve ever seen. When this thing gets picked up to become a Netflix movie someday, we’re keeping this cover for the poster. Thank you for always being the visual visionary I am not.

To Stacey from Champagne Book Design for rocking the balls off this interior formatting. You always hit it out of the damn park, but this time, you straight up *destroyed* it. This thing is a literal work of art because of you.

A big thanks to Gay Romance Reviews for working on this project with me. For helping me get this wonderful not-so-little book into the hands of more excellent readers.

I also have to mention all the OnlyFans creators I followed in preparation for writing this book. Not that I think they’ll ever see this, but these guys made the tireless research *semi*-bearable. (Kidding, of course. I’m officially a slut for their content. Just a porn-slut in general, but I digress.) *Especially* Alejo Pino, my Avi inspiration. I’m telling you, this dude is a literal god. Thanks Hot Alex for wearing a backwards cap and bringing my vision of Aviel Vega to life.

Big-ups to everyone who participated in the caption comments for this book! All the amazing readers in my group, and the awesome author friends who played along… Andi Jaxon, JR Gray, Becca Steele, all of y’all. You understood the fuck out of the assignment. I wish I could have included every submission, but believe you me, I got a great deal of satisfaction out of going through them. You guys are in the .2% of my heart. Lolz ;)

To the Fandom… This book is quite literally *for* you. It's in the title. My tribe, my weirdos, my badass, pervy little monsters. Minds open and middle fingers up. I love you all so damn much.

And for the readers who devour and rave about everything I write like Avi with his junk food. Who spend your precious funds supporting me, and your precious time making amazing edits and reels, posting, sharing, pimping and celebrating the filthy mayhem that goes on in my mind. For the all the comments and messages and endless love and support you guys give… Thank you.

It's all for you. Every single thing I do… is for you.

The *fans*.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hi, guys! I'm Nyla K… New member of the Banned Books Club! Eee!

I'm an awkward sailor-mouthed lover of all things romance, existing in the Dirty Lew, up in Maine, with my fiancé, who you can call PB, or Patty Banga if you're nasty. When I'm not writing and reading sexy books, I'm rocking out to Machine Gun Kelly and YUNGBLUD, cooking yummy food and fussing over my kitten (and no, that's not a euphemism). Did I mention I have a dirtier mind than probably everyone you know?

I like to admire hot guys (don't we all?) and book boyfriends, cake and ice cream are my kryptonite. I can recite every word that was ever uttered on *Friends*, *Family Guy*, and *How I Met Your Mother*, red Gatorade is my lifeblood, and I love to sing, although I've been told I do it in a Cher voice for some reason. I'm very passionate about the things that matter to me, and art is probably the biggest one. If you tell me you like my books, I'll give you whatever you want. I consider my readers are my friends, and I welcome anyone to find me on social media any time you want to talk books or sexy dudes!

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